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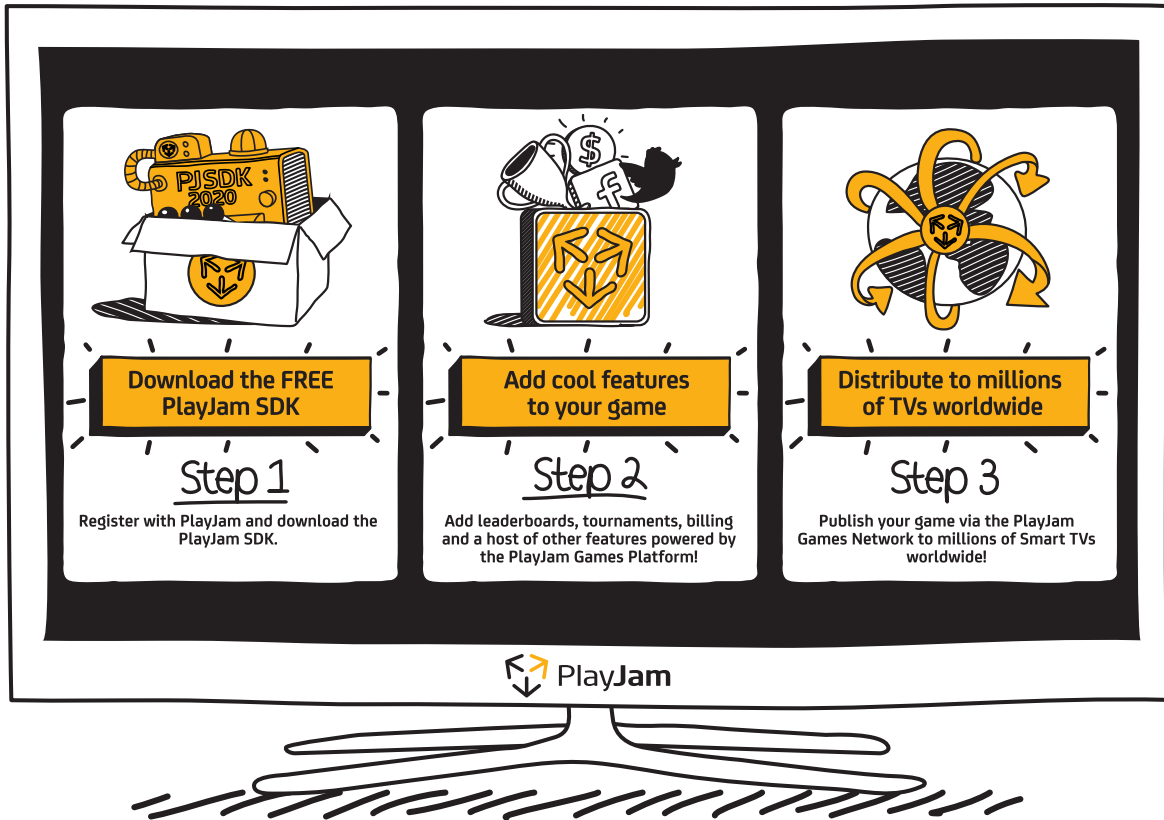
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Letter from the Director



They say that if you want to ensure that the dinner party goes smoothly and that everyone enjoys everyone and leaves more or less on a positive note, you shouldn't bring up religion. Or politics. Or pretty much anything controversial. Stick with the basics: family, movies, sports, the weather. (Strike that. Do *not* talk about the weather—lest

someone take offense that you do or do not believe in global warming or climate change or whatever we call it these days. Better to stick with sports.)

That's certainly the safe way to navigate a dinner party or happy hour or the next industry meet-and-greet. But let's be honest. Talking about what's playing at the Cineplex may be neutral ground, but it makes for a pretty dull evening. You want to have an engaging evening with a bunch of barely-know-you former strangers? Ask questions. Hard questions. Provocative, stroke-your-beard-and-think-about-it questions.

It's magical—and more. Asking those sorts of questions doesn't just make for a more interesting evening—it's an essential way to learn. And as long as you go into any conversation with the objective of shar-

ing ideas rather than challenging or changing opinions, you'll probably leave on pretty good terms anyway.

A genuine curiosity about new ideas or alternative perspectives is also good for business—maybe even essential now that I think about it. You want to get better? Anticipate the Next Big Thing? Get your synapses firing in entirely new ways? Find out what others are up to: why they have chosen a particular business model over another one, how they respond to setbacks, what the key was to their greatest success, why they decided to zig when everyone else was zagging. Ask.

If you do, it could change everything. Go deep with a new acquaintance and more often than not you will find that you've made a new friend. Or a new business partner. Or at the very least, someone to Skype with at midnight the next time you want to bounce a new idea off of someone who you know will give you a candid opinion. What's more, you may never again find yourself suffering through a long and painful dinner party.

So go ahead—talk about the Big Game if you must. But when you're done, start asking questions.

Jenica

Jessica Tams, *Director of the Casual Games Association*
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EVENT CALENDAR

12-14 February 2013
Casual Connect Europe

Congress Center Hamburg
Marseiller Straße 1
Hamburg, 20355
Germany



21-23 May 2013
Casual Connect Asia

Shangri-La Hotel
22 Orange Grove Road
258350, Singapore



30-31 July & 1 August 2013
Casual Connect San Francisco

Hilton San Francisco
Union Square
333 O'Farrell St.,
San Francisco, CA 94102



October 2013
Casual Connect Kyiv

Kyiv, in Ukraine, is a modern historical city located between Eastern and Western Europe. Eastern Europe is known for excellent school systems that emphasize math and sciences, while fostering creative thinking. Tetris and about 30% of the Top 10 Games in 2011, were partially developed in Eastern Europe.



Contributors



Ken Murphy

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Ken is vice president of studios for GameHouse, RealNetworks' games division, and leads a global team responsible for some of the industry's most recognized and acclaimed casual games franchises, including: *Collapse!*, *Delicious!*, and *UNO*.

Seattle, WA



Cooper DuBois

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Cooper is the co-founder and Chief Creative Officer of DoubleDown Interactive, makers of *DoubleDown Casino*. He's designed games and interactive media for over 15 years.

Seattle, WA



Michael Sorrenti

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Michael is the president of Game Pill Interactive, a studio that specializes in casual games and interactive entertainment. Michael is no stranger to entertainment and consumer brands, having worked previously at Telus, Warner Bros and Paramount.

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East Side Games Studio

Vancouver, BC, Canada



Aaron LeMay

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Aaron has made major contributions to multi-million dollar franchises including *Red Faction*, *The Punisher*, *Saints Row*, and *Halo*. He is currently working as Creative Director at En Masse Entertainment, publishing the first ever true combat MMO, *TERA*.

Seattle, WA



Bob Wiederhold

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Bob has more than 25 years of high technology experience. Until an acquisition by IBM in 2008, Bob served as chairman, CEO, and president of Transitive Corporation, the worldwide leader in cross-platform virtualization with over 20 million users.

Mountain View, CA



Nicholas Yanes

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Nicholas Yanes is currently an American Studies PhD candidate (ABD) at the University of Iowa. His professional and academic interests are Early US History, Contemporary Popular Culture, and the Industries of Popular Entertainment.

Iowa City, IA



Awem

Mogilev, Belarus



About the Cover



Julia Lebedeva

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Julia joined Nevosoft and the casual video games industry as a public relations manager in 2009 and took a fresh look at interacting with the casual games audience. Now Julia is head of the PR and advertising department where her responsibilities include planning PR campaigns, interacting with mass media and negotiating with key partners.

St. Petersburg, Russia



Mark Anthony Taturan

Mark Anthony Taturan, Casual Game Artist at Boomzap, loves drawing and painting people and characters. His works have been featured in both comics and art books. He has contributed not just character art but also background and puzzle art for top casual games such as *Antique Road Trip* and the *Dana Knightstone* series (*Death at Faring Point* and *Death under Tuscan Skies*).

The cover features archaeologist Dr. Felicity Turnstone, the lead heroine of Boomzap's match-three game *Jewels of Cleopatra*. In this scene, Dr. Turnstone is rendered in a completely different art style as she explores jungle ruins in search of her next new adventure.

James Barnard

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James has worked in game development for the last 13 years, having roles as both a lead designer and producer. His experience includes working on projects with Sega, EA, Midway, Acclaim and (most recently) LucasArts.

Singapore



Boomzap
Manila, Philippines

New & Notable

East Side Games Studio

An Interview with Joshua Nilson, COO and Co-Founder

Let's start at the beginning. How did East Side Games start up? Where did the idea for your company come from?

East Side Games officially opened in July, 2011, but most of us had already been working together for a couple of years at DES Games. At DES Games, we had made over a dozen games including *Pot Farm*. Our Creative Director, Galan Akin, and I had learned a lot of lessons from the early inception of our company, and after discussion with Jason Bailey (pioneer of virtual goods and founder of Super Rewards) we decided to reboot our studio, taking Jason on as the CEO of East Side Games. Under his guidance—and with the employees themselves chipping in—we bought out the old shareholders and created a new, fresh entity as a team of twelve.

As a response to our experiences in console and PC game development, we really want to do things differently with East Side Games. We strive to remain fiercely indepen-

dent and build games *with* our fans and *for* our fans. Now, just over a year later, we are a team of fifty and have been profitable every step of the way.

Tell us what it's like to be an independent developer in Vancouver.

The indie game developer scene in Vancouver is booming. While big companies like DeNA, GREE, PopCap and TinyCo are just now setting up shop, the real excitement is with the local startups like A Thinking Ape, Blitzoo, Eruptive, Hothead and East Side Games.

There are a lot of up-and-comers as well, building games with small but powerful teams. It's inspiring and exciting. We all meet up at events like the Vancouver Social Games Meetup and Full Indie Meetup, have a few pints, share knowledge and stay in contact. We try to help other indies out by working together on projects, offering advice or pointing them in the right direction. And it's not just us—other studios are kicking ass as well and putting Vancouver on the map. Indies are taking over, and this is great for fans of the games and the industry in general.

Vancouver has always been a hotbed for console game companies like EA, Ubisoft, Activision, Rockstar, THQ and many other big studios. While the big studios are stumbling to catch up with the changing tide of free-to-play and virtual goods-based economies on new platforms, the best talent has seen the writing on the wall and has been consistently bleeding away from the big boys and into the local indie studios.

Why did you decide to call it East Side Games? Is there a special meaning to the name?

We're from Vancouver, and specifically East Van. It's a great area to work in, and many of us

live nearby. It's gritty and honest, with very few business-suit types to be seen. It is dirty, edgy and real, with nothing flashy to hide behind. We are hustlers in a neighborhood of hustling. We named our studio to reflect our pride in where we are and what we came up from.

What is the company's mission? What is being done to fulfill that mission?

It's pretty simple: We want to make a game for every screen and for every part of your day. We want to be your morning cup of coffee, the bacon in your sandwich, the cheese in your bowl of macaroni. (Well, I stole that last bit.) When you are waiting for the bus, we want you to load up *NomNom Combo* or *DragonUp*. When you get to work, we want you to play *Pot Farm* or *I Like Slots* on your desktop. When you are at home on the couch, we want you to play *Ruby Skies*. We have games for everyone, good games that are engaging, fun and well-supported. We all play our own games, and I think that is really key.

That being said, we don't see ourselves as purveyors of innovation for its own sake. We take known mechanics and genres and add our own +1s. Then we apply our experience in virality, community management, and analytics to ensure that we prove out our concepts. These things are our secret sauce. We are not reinventing the F2P experience; we are simply adding a bit of edge and a touch of humor to things that are already full of awesomeness.

How does East Side Games stand out from the crowd? What makes it unique?

Our culture. Culture is king here at East Side Games, and so we do things differently from other companies. We share our game analytics and customer feedback with the entire team; we listen and respond to our fans. We have an open-floor concept—no one sits in an office—and we work in small teams where people are empowered to make decisions.





Jason Bailey



Joshua Nilson



We even share our office space with other indies. Sometimes they help us out on our games, and in return they receive mentoring and support on their own projects. We encourage our team members to work on their own side projects because creative people need to express themselves, and we want them to make inspiring stuff. At East Side Games, it's about coming to work every day and having fun killing it.

Part of our founding vision comes from being game industry studio veterans, where unpaid overtime is the norm and everyone is miserable. As a counter to this, we believe in a concentrated work day: We work hard and are focused; then we go home at night and live

We are not reinventing the F2P experience; we are simply adding a bit of edge and a touch of humor to things that are already full of awesomeness.

our lives. Sure, problems arise at times when a team decides to put in additional hours fire-fighting, but we ensure that this does not become a habit. Our studio culture does not support being coerced into working overtime.



We respect a life/work balance. But we also expect a high level of performance from each other.

We believe in growing our talent. We have had interns stay on and become producers while some with years of console industry experience were not able to adjust to the different pace of our development cycles. Not everyone is cut out for a culture that requires such a high level of adaptability. You have to think like an entrepreneur, take ownership of what you build, respect what our data tells us, and support an ongoing release cadence.

Walk us through a typical day at East Side Games. How does the company environment affect work? What is it like to work at East Side Games?

"Typical" isn't really in our vocabulary—rarely is there a typical day here. We make social and mobile games, so there is always something happening! Our fans are the reason we are here, so we want to ensure that our games are always up and working great for them. We have people on deck 24 hours a day to take care of any issues that crop up.

We use Agile, and stand-ups start at 10 a.m.; most teams do weekly sprints. Add in a lunchtime soccer game, meetings at the pub, or catered meals on Wednesdays for company-wide lunch-and-learn sessions, and there's always something going on here. I guess that's

the hardest thing about working at our studio: You aren't overly managed but are expected to knock it out of the park, so it takes personal discipline to schedule yourself accordingly. I think it's a really fun place to work; we joke a lot even when we are really busy and I think that humor comes across in our games. We work hard and play hard, but always deliver. The management team is always excited to get up and be here; we are super proud of the team we have built and trust them to be adults and get their work done.



East Side Games Studio

Tell us a bit about creating a game.

What is your creative process?

You have to empower the entire team; everyone has to be involved as a stakeholder. We want every member of the team to feel like: "I invented that. That is mine." We start with a playable prototype and really make sure the mechanics work and are fun. If the mechanics of the prototype aren't engaging, we scrap it and start over rather than go any further with development. We get everyone in the studio to play and provide feedback, to intuitively "know" if it feels right and there is something viable in the mechanics. Quickly prototyping game mechanics is so much more productive than making endless paper documents, slide decks and pitches because a real playable—built out and in people's hands—gets you real feedback! We often release games that prove out a couple of these mechanics, learn from them, and then iterate



on what works for future games. *Pot Farm* was one of these games—it now has over seven million installs and is still growing after two years. So build small and often, test and repeat. The real proof, and real work, comes after you launch and start to grow the game with your fans.



Part of our founding vision comes from being game industry studio veterans, where unpaid overtime is the norm and everyone is miserable. As a counter to this, we believe in a concentrated work day: We work hard and are focused, then we go home at night and live our lives.

How does your technology infrastructure affect game creation?

We build our own technology, so it helps us out and lets us focus on building awesome games. We have a custom analytics platform and a couple of game engines we use, so we can work fast with small teams. Because the platforms are always changing, you have to be able to move fast and have tech that isn't married to anything in particular. Over the years we had spent a lot of time and money on third-party solutions that make magic bean-like claims, before we ultimately confirmed that we could make superior tech for ourselves. We believe strongly in hand-rolling the proper solutions internally so we know we can trust our data and make the right decisions.

What comes first: the platform choice or the game idea? How do you choose what platform to develop for?

The game, always. We really want to build games that are platform-agnostic. Platforms will come and go; good games and experiences are what people want. We choose platforms by where we think a particular game will have the highest chance of a quick and lasting success. The hope is always to take all games to all platforms.

With more attention on casual, mobile and social games, how has the market changed game development?

The market has changed massively; we could do a whole article on just this topic. We are no

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East Side Games Studio



Our studio culture does not support being coerced into working overtime. We respect a life/work balance. But we also expect a high level of performance from each other.

longer making games for males aged 15 to 35, and this is a good thing. Since the demographics have changed, the people making games have as well. We have more female engineers, system administrators, producers, etc. We also have people from other disciplines such as web development, marketing, and analytics. This development approach has forced us to be more agile, to use analytics more and to focus more on community management. In AAA games, you make the game you really want to play, and in social games you make the game your fans tell you they want to play. We launch a game and do iterations on it to make the experience better for our fans. It is really exciting that we affect a change in minutes or hours on Facebook to improve the experience instantly for the people actively playing the game.

There are teasers of an iOS game and a HTML5 game on your website. Can you give us a few hints of what to expect?

We have been a bit quiet of late, as we have been working on some tools and tech to make our games even better. We have a bold new project coming out for iOS called *Ruby Skies*. *Ruby Skies* is a romantic adventure game and it looks beautiful—I like to say it's like waffles for your eyes. The game has amazing art and engaging game-play based on map exploration and collection completion mechanics. Added to this, we have introduced elements rare to



the mobile space, such as relationship-building and falling in love, done in a clever fashion.

We also have another mobile game coming soon called *DragonUp*, which combines dragons and wizards with *Tiny Tower*-like growth and happiness management. The art style is whimsical and vibrant; the dragons are imbued with very quirky personalities. We then pour on a generous helping of our unicorn sauce which will result in an overwhelming sense of “HELL YEAH! #WIN.”

When will your new projects be open to the public?

Ruby Skies is out really soon. We are just testing and tweaking it right now. *DragonUp* is slated for September, but we want to give it an extra serving of *awesome-sauce* before launching it. We also have some secrets we are cooking up. You will have to drink a few pints with me before I let that slip out, or stalk us at www.eastsidegamestudio.com ❄️

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A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words



The Art Design of *TERA*

We sat down with Aaron LeMay, creative director at En Masse Entertainment, to talk about the creation of the fantasy world of *TERA* and the diverse sampling of creatures and locales within the game. *TERA* has a wide range of creatures—thousands in total—including the terrifying Disc Reapers, the fairytale-like Glacial Giants, and various playable characters such as the animalistic Popori and defiant Castanics. The designers had to consider how the game's dynamic, real-time, action-combat would affect everything, and the result is an MMO world unlike anything else. Let's take a closer look at the art behind *TERA*.

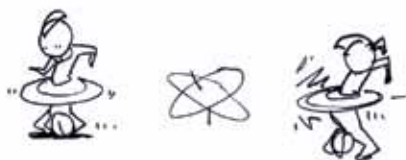
Monsters



DISC REAPER

The Disc Reaper is the result of a brutal experiment on human bodies. It was initially designed as a humanoid monster in a reclining position.

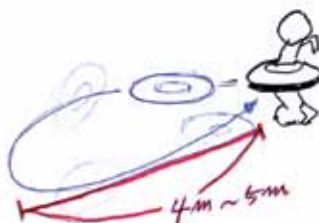
This reclining design produced awkward movement when the character moved from side to side or changed directions. For this reason, we changed the monster's body to an upright position.



At close range, the rotator blade swings from the monster's waist. The rotating blade reaches maximum speed at the point of impact. The associated audio cue is a key part of conveying this effect.



The Disc Reaper swings when it walks due to the spinning blade.



The blue edge of the disc launches at players in a parabolic arc, allowing the monster to attack at distances of four to five meters.



AKALATH

The beautiful and eccentric shapes of Gaudi architecture, as well as the planets, space, and the solar system, served as inspiration for this extraordinary monster.



It's regular attacks consist of quick strikes with twin swords. It also summons a powerful great sword that produces area damage.

VENGEFUL GLACIAL GIANT

The initial design of the vengeful Glacial Giant was inspired by the environment the monster inhabits. Its weapons were inspired by that of the Vikings: an oversize ice axe and a shield that deals powerful critical damage.



Considering the area's climate, we gave the vengeful Glacial Giant a thick skin resembling a rocky stalactite formed over generations. A Viking helmet, a necklace made from the eyes of an ice dragon, and a touch of ice on beard and skin helped to complete the look.



Q&A

Vengeful Glacial Giant

What kind of special or unique attacks did you give to the Glacial Giant?

AARON LEMAY: It does a powerful attack with a gigantic ice axe. The Glacial Giant uses it to deliver threatening blows that can knock players down.

Are there other, similar enemies in the game that share some of the Glacial Giant's characteristics?

AL: I cannot think of anything similar. While some other enemies share similar attack patterns, the Glacial Giant's look is unique.

The Art Design of *TERA*



POPORI

The popori are a pleasant, nature-loving race. The initial inspiration for the race's design was simply to create a strong anthropomorphosis of human and forest creature. The early result was a character with too many competing characteristics. To resolve this, we refocused our design to make the race look more animal than human.

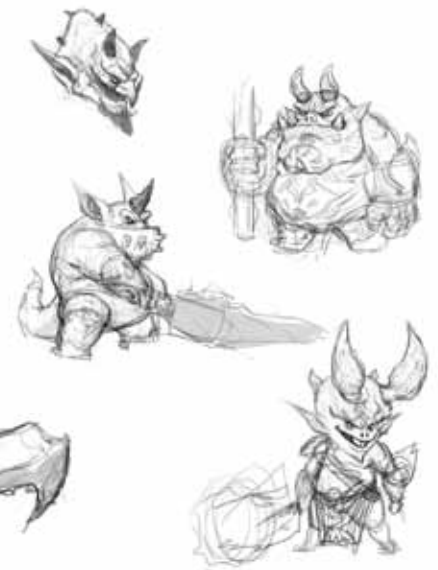


Monsters



HELLION THRALL

Hellion Thrall wields a gigantic axe that affords it a wide range of attack. Its muscular build, protruding horns, and thick leathery skin are reminiscent of a real-world rhinoceros.



Q&A



The Hellion Thrall's immense size is meant to convey its power, as does its ability to wield a weapon nearly twice the length of its body.

Asian goblins and the idealized presentation of the devil in Western culture were inspirations for the monster's demonic look.

The Hellion Thrall's enormous jaw and excessive underbite help to emphasize its imposing presence.



Disc Reaper

Were there any games, films, or books that directly inspired this enemy?

AL: I like Clive Barker's works, so I can say that was an influence. I thought that a deformed creature would be perfect for the concept of the Disc Reaper.

How did you come up with the crawling/walking hybrid?

AL: I wanted to create a grotesque mutant that was bred for battle. The initial design had the monster positioned horizontally, requiring it to use the arms on both of its torsos to crawl around. I later changed the monster's posture so that it stood upright. This allowed it to be more flexible in its attacks and movements.

Was this character always intended to have a ranged attack as well?

AL: In the original design, the Disc Reaper's gigantic circular blade would disappear once shot. The effect was too work-intensive for a single monster. As a result, we included the blade in the core design of the monster instead of as a separate special effect. The Disc Reaper uses the rotating blade for close-range attacks and shoots the blade to attack players at a distance.

Hellion Thrall

What inspired this enemy?

AL: The movie *Hellboy* served as an initial inspiration. From there I gradually added my own ideas. As for the asymmetrical design, that's a product of my personal taste; I like asymmetrical images.

What kind of special attacks does the Hellion Thrall have, and how can players counter them?

AL: This monster can be irritating to players because they're often forced to fight many of them at once. The Hellion Thrall throws itself toward the player, leading with its huge weapon. Luckily, its attack pattern is relatively simple to learn.

The Art Design of *TERA*



Monsters



SHURIAN MINDBENDER
The Shurian Mindbender was inspired by priests from the Middle Ages.

The Shurian Mindbender fights like a sorcerer in battle, but with strong defense and heavy armor.

After the Shurian Mindbender's strong magic attack, it leaves itself open to counterattack. That's when the player should strike.

STATUE AT DRAGONFALL

As it is a main landmark of the area, a strong visual impact was a central focus during the concept stages. The design of the statue itself was inspired by the shape of a Korean mosquito coil.



The climate surrounding Dragonfall was also a consideration. Because Dragonfall lies between subarctic and warmer temperate regions, the natural vegetation of the Rocky Mountains became a visual reference for the area.



Landscape

Q&A

Dragonfall

Are there any real-world or fantasy locations that inspired this area?

AL: Alaskan sea stacks, the Chinese city of Zhangjiajie, and Khao Phing Kan (the James Bond island) in Thailand were all inspirations. Other locations from fantasy fiction, movies such as *Avatar*, and other formative works of art also inspired me in the design of this area.

What is unique about this region, and how can players interact with it?

AL: The initial idea was that the ancient castle guards the town located below it, and that players can climb up to the castle from the town. Unfortunately, this didn't work out due to our tight schedule and some other issues.

Where did the unique shapes of this structure come from? Do they serve a purpose?

AL: My primary goal was to create a totally new and wonderful structure that has a strong visual impact. For that, I was looking for a unique design. One night, the mosquito coil at my son's bedside caught my eye. I wondered how it must look to mosquitos. This idea inspired me to create the statue.

The Art Design of *TERA*



FANE OF KAPRIMA

During the initial concept phases, the design for the Fane of Kaprima featured an open architecture. More open designs provide more variety in gameplay. This concept later changed to a tower-type dungeon in a more enclosed space in the interest of directing traffic flow.

Landscape



The design motif was inspired by the ancient ruins of Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam and Thailand, but we recast it in a fantasy style.



Q&A

Fane of Kaprima

How long does it take to put together a dungeon like this, and how many people work on a single dungeon?

AL: One concept artist and one developer worked on this dungeon for five weeks in total—from conceptual design to actual development.

What was the player experience intended to be like?

AL: With a short development time, we focused on adding more depth and expression to the art rather than introducing a completely new design. The result is a fantastical dungeon, with gigantic towers and castles, inside a cave and surrounded by cliffs.

Are there any environmental traps or triggers that can be used in this dungeon?

AL: Battles take place on the platforms between towers or within the towers themselves. Players need to cross the bridges to move to the next platforms or use the stairs to move up and down the towers. Such a design helped us create more dynamic paths through the dungeon. In addition, we set up a few booby traps in unexpected places to keep players on their toes.

By the Numbers

Not Easy, But Worth It

An Intro to the Russian Mobile App Market

The Russian iOS and Android app markets are currently among the most lucrative in the world. Although one rarely hears it discussed publicly, almost every analytical report on market growth rates features Russia. And while the potential of the Russian market is dwarfed by that of China (due to sheer size), the Russian market, with eight million iOS/Android users, is free of most of the problems found in the Chinese market. Moreover, it is much easier to enter the Russian market—once you've mastered the basics. Perhaps this article will help.

Astounding Growth

According to Distimo, developers' revenue from the App Store in Russia grew by 115% between May 2011 and May 2012. Only the Japanese App Store saw higher growth during that time. Meanwhile, revenue from the Russian Google Play has been growing at an increasing rate as well: It's up by 250%—roughly double the growth rate of the US

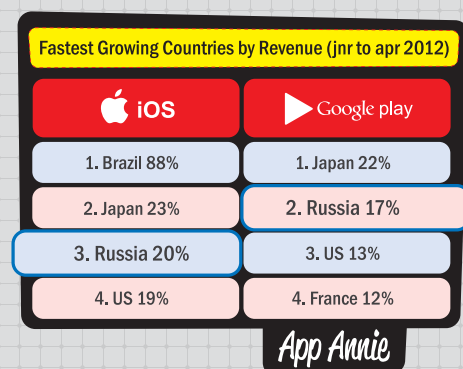
The Russian market demonstrated the second largest iOS revenue growth and third largest Google Play growth during the first half of 2012.

market! App Annie analysts have reported similar trends: Their data show that the Russian market demonstrated the second largest iOS revenue growth and third largest Google Play growth during the first half of 2012.² The mobile games sector is especially noteworthy: Android games revenue, for example, has grown by 145% in the same period.

It is thanks to these trends that App Annie lists Russia as one of the top 10 countries in terms of revenue made by iOS games.³ In addition, eMarketer forecasts that Russia's mobile advertising market will grow by 85%—faster than in any Western European country—with market volume reaching a substantial \$40 million.

The high increase in revenue in the Russian mobile markets is fueled in part by growing incomes, which, in turn, has spurred fast

penetration of smartphone devices. Flurry Analytics reports a 189% increase in active iOS/Android gadgets over a twelve-month period ending July 2012.⁴ On top of that, MTS,



one of the three largest Russian mobile operators, reports that the first six months of 2012 saw sales of as many as five million devices—a 70% increase over the same period last year. However, even that understates the overall growth in device penetration. Add in the sales of second-hand and gray market devices and you can likely increase that total by another 20%.

Tablet usage provides perhaps the most telling hint of what's to come in the Russian mobile market. In January 2012, the search engine Yandex estimated the number of iPad tablets in Russia at 700,000—a sevenfold increase over the previous year.⁵ Such figures suggest that the era of rapid growth in mobile app revenue volume in Russia is only just beginning.

There's another factor confirming that the time when one could disregard Russian markets is gone: Apple is establishing a full legal presence in the country. Last August, Apple registered a limited company (OOO Apple Rus) created to handle sales in the Russian elec-



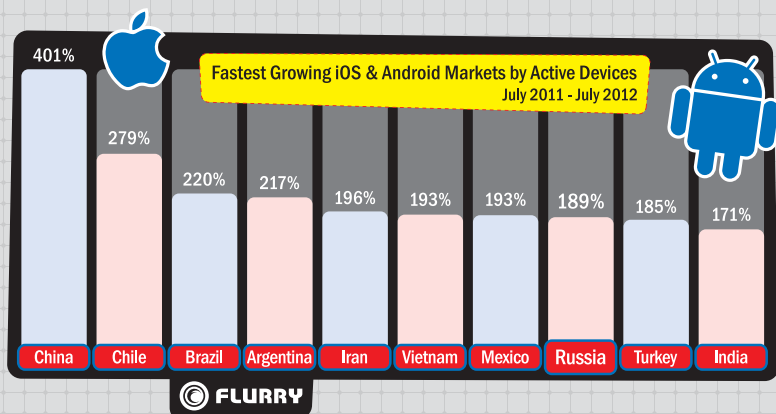
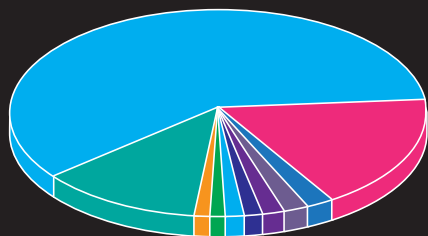


Diagram 1

LandGrabbers revenue by country



COUNTRY	REVENUE SHARE
United States	60%
Russia	18%
United Kingdom	2%
Netherlands	2%
Australia	2%
Canada	1%
Germany	1%
France	1%
Italy	1%
Other	12%



tronic devices market, both wholesale and retail. It is therefore highly plausible that we'll soon see official App Store retail centers opening in Russia.

Revenue Potential

The financial side of the Russian mobile market is equally promising. As reported by Discovery Research Group, in 2011, the total volume of the overall Russian game market reached \$1 billion. Mobile games, however, accounted for only \$30 to \$40 million of that total (with approximately two-thirds of that coming from iOS games, according to Nevosoft). Still, App Annie reports 17% growth in iOS and 20% in Google Play game revenues for the first quarter of 2012.

To get a sense of the revenue potential of a successful game in Russia, consider the case of Nevosoft's *Landgrabbers*, a top-10 strategy game in 89 countries (see *Diagram 1*). Assume that a top-20 grossing game for iOS in Russia will make as much as \$2.5 million in a single month. And assume that the Russian version of a game will typically net around 20% of total revenue. You can do the math yourself from there.

Facing Potential Obstacles

In light of these figures, you may wonder why the Russian mobile games market receives so little attention. I believe it comes to this: Many people overestimate the obstacles to market-entry in Russia. While it is true that it takes a significant effort to enter the market, the po-

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Top Fastest Growing Countries In Terms Of Revenue In The Apple App Store for iPhone

Based on revenue of top 200 highest grossing apps, top 30 countries are analyzed, May 2011 - May 2012

Rank	Country	Year-on-year growth
1	Japan	560%
2	Russia	115%
3	China	109%
4	Taiwan	101%
5	Thailand	84%
6	Brazil	83%
7	Mexico	63%
8	Korea	59%
9	Turkey	54%
10	Canada	47%



An Intro to the Russian Mobile App Market

tential returns make it truly worth the effort—assuming, that is, that you consider a few hundred thousand dollars “worth it.”

Localization is one of the most significant barriers to entry. The Russophone audience is very demanding. Local consumers are used to Russian language content since traditionally all movies and games have been localized

loads, you’ll have to think of tech support as well—knowing that no one will be reporting a bug in English.

To grasp the complexity of the task, you might think about it this way: Let’s say you currently have a great English-language website for downloadable games. It’s been running smoothly for some time and has a large audi-

establish a credible presence in the Russian market. Typically, the developer in such cases keeps the intellectual property and other rights while the publisher helps to squeeze the maximum profit out of the Russian market, localizing the game and assisting with marketing and PR. Nevosoft, for example, does everything in preparation of release: tests on various devices, game descriptions and reviews, promo art, SEO/SEM promotion in app stores, and so on.

Even if you choose a solution other than Nevosoft, your chances for success are greatly increased if you partner with a local firm with the expertise necessary to help you connect with the local audience and thrive. Will it be easy? No. But will it be worth it? All indications are: *Absolutely.* *

Many people overestimate the obstacles to market-entry in Russia. While it is true that it takes a significant effort to enter the market, the potential returns make it truly worth the effort—assuming, that is, that you consider a few hundred thousand dollars “worth it.”

to high professional standards. The expectations are equally high for mobile apps. Without the assistance of a native speaker, a foreign developer simply won’t be able to make an informed judgment on the translation contractor’s performance, thus forfeiting control of a potentially key issue.

Once the game is localized, it’s time for the marketing professionals to chip in: While there’s much less competition in the Russian App Store and Google Play than, say, in the US, no promotion means no game. And all your experience with publishing in top English-language media won’t help: Press releases and reviews will also have to be in Russian. And once they’re written, you’ll face the additional challenge of handpicking the editors who are most likely to publish them.

There are other challenges as well. For your games to come on top in search results in a given store, your SEM will have to reflect a mastery of the Russian language. And then you’ll have to get some traffic flowing, and although more and more international advertising networks are offering targeting deals for Russia, the quality of their traffic remains mediocre. And, of course, if your game becomes a hit with tens of thousands of down-

loading and buying the games. One day, you decide to expand and hire an agency to translate all site content into Russian—or Chinese, for that matter. Will you, in all earnestness, expect the newly translated website to immediately generate hefty sales?

Of course not. Your newly translated site will need to take into account specific features of the local market as well as consumer behavior. You’ll have to develop advertising campaigns to bring traffic to the site, campaigns that reflect an understanding of the local audience. Tech support will have to be available in the local language as well. And all of that takes time and investment and local expertise. So why, then, do so many people think they will find immediate success in the local App Store or Android market if they simply hire a freelance contractor to localize their apps?

Bridging the Gap

The obvious alternative to freelance localization is to take a more comprehensive approach to your Russian games. One solution is to work directly with a Russian publisher whose staff is comprised of local experts who can help you overcome barriers to entry and

1 http://www.distimo.com/blog/2012_06_emerging-app-markets-russia-brazil-mexico-and-turkey/

2 <http://www.appannie.com/blog/game-of-phones/#.UD-3LOMGTVYg>

3 <http://www.slideshare.net/AppAnnie/casual-connect-2012-app-store-economy> (slide 8/26)

4 [http://blog.flurry.com/bid/88867/ios-and-android-adoption-explodes-internationally?source=Blog_Email_\[iOS%20and%20Android%20Adop\]](http://blog.flurry.com/bid/88867/ios-and-android-adoption-explodes-internationally?source=Blog_Email_[iOS%20and%20Android%20Adop])

5 http://company.yandex.ru/researches/figures/2012/yandex_on_ipad_2012.xml

3... 2... 1...



ARKADIUM

www.facebook.com/mahjonggdimensions

Studio Spotlight

Awem: A Ten-year Success Story

COMPANY: Awem
FOUNDED: 2002
OFFICES: Mogilev, Belarus
EMPLOYEES: 60
PORTFOLIO: 25+ games
MOTTO: Quality Before Quantity
WEB: www.awem.com

First Steps: Shooters and Shareware

Awem is a small but ambitious company in Belarus, Europe. It was founded in the 2002, when Oleg Rogovenko talked his friend Alexander Razumov into forming Awem with him so that he could pursue

his passion for creating new, exciting computer games. At that time, Oleg was a sophomore at Mogilev State University of Food Technologies, and Alex had just graduated. The two friends started working on their first title, *Pac Boy*, with Oleg handling the programming and design and Alexander the 3D modeling. *Pac Boy* was finished in spring of 2002. It took only four months.

Building games in 2002

was anything but a sure bet. It was the time of shareware, after all, and nobody could predict how well any game would do. So Oleg and Alexander waited. And waited. It took about a month, but finally their hopes were rewarded: They made their first dollar on the game! It wasn't enough to start mass production, but it was enough to encourage them and inspire plans for the future. They started working on another game right away. Within a few months, the pair released *Battle Man*, a shareware clone of the good old *Battle City* game. It wasn't a great success, but it was a good attempt.

The beginning was hard. Limited financing and an unpredictable market made their early impact. So, the period of 2002 to 2005 could be called the time of experiment, the rise and fall. The company experimented with graphics, techniques, and special

Building games in 2002 was anything but a sure bet. It was the time of shareware, after all, and nobody could predict how well any game would do.

effects and released several games. At that point most strategic decisions were made intuitively.

It wasn't until the release of *Star Defender* in 2003 that Oleg and Alexander had their first really popular and successful game—so popular, in fact, that the title became a series and still sells well to this day. (The core team for *Star Defender* remains unchanged: Oleg and Alexander.)

Deeper and Wider

Up to this point, all of Awem's games involved shooting. Oleg and Alexander repeatedly faced the choice between two options: to go deeper and make a series of games, or to go wider and launch new titles. Several times Oleg wanted to develop a series, to find a popular product and improve it. The partners could tell, given the reality of the game market, they needed more and better information to make such decisions. It was time to get serious about analytics.

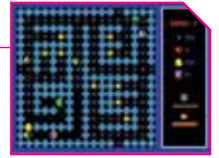
So it was that in 2004 the company took part in an international game conference in Russia for the first time. One of the things Awem learned from colleagues was that the space shooters they were building appealed to a very limited audience. The market turned to less complicated and brighter casual games. Thinking it over, they decided to shift to more popular genres, beginning with *Cradle of Rome*, a



AWEM TIMELINE

2002

- Awem is born
- *Pac Boy* and *Battle Man* are released
- Two enthusiasts make their first games



2003

- Space hooter era begins
- *Star Defender* and *Bombardix* are released
- Two enthusiasts find out that games need to speak English



2004

- *Xoid* and *Blade Master* are released
- First conference experience
- Two enthusiasts become specialists and get their own office

2005

- *Star Defender 2* is released
- *Alien Stars* is released
- Awem realizes that games demand real promotion



2006

- *Star Defender 3* is released
- *CosmoLines* is released
- Awem finds more allies and a bigger office

2007

- Trying new genres and shifting to casual
- *Cradle of Rome* is released and crowned with laurels
- Awem becomes a sponsor at Casual Connect Kyiv



2008

- Moving into a new comfy office
- Silver sponsor at Casual Connect
- Awem invites more devoted specialists

2009

- *Romance of Rome* is released
- Gold sponsor at Casual Connect
- Awem shows the best games on-line

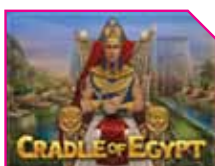


2010

- *Golden Trails: The New Western Rush* is released
- *The Island: Castaway* and *Letters from Nowhere* are released
- Awem arranges www.awem.ru

2011

- *Cradle of Egypt* and *The Island: Castaway 2* are released
- iOS year for Awem



2012

- *Golden Trails 3: The Guardian's Creed* is released
- Awem changes its logo

AWEM

Awem: A Ten-year Success Story



colorful, friendly match-three game. The shift away from shooters also prompted Awem to add more females to the team in order to produce the sort of crisp, beautiful, hand-drawn graphics their new titles would require.

Shifting to Casual

It took a couple of years, but in 2007 Awem finally had its first non-shooter hit game: *Cradle of Rome*, the first

installment in the great match-three *Cradle* series. In these games, Awem was the first to develop a new approach to the match-three genre: In addition to matching tiles and scoring points, the player must also use resources to build a city. Thanks to that innovation, *Cradle of Rome* entered the main game charts and stayed in the Top 10 for about two weeks.

Just as Rome was not built in a day, neither are games. The development process for these new games took quite a long time—about nine months. There was always a core team—about five special-

ists, plus QA (and lots of testing). So, Awem needed more specialists and a bigger office. They finally got it in 2008.

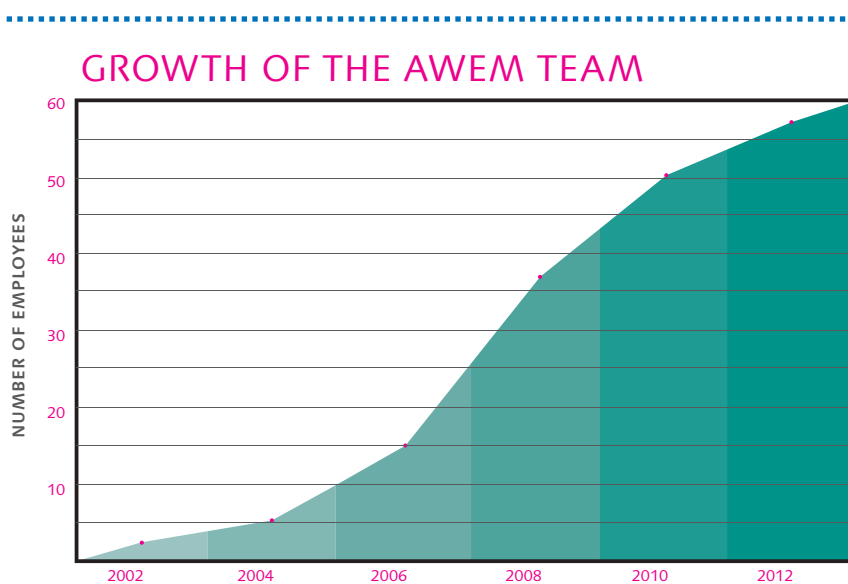
All along, Awem has worked hard to create a group of loyal fans who enthusiastically beta-test upcoming games. The team has also tried to stay open to experiments. It has been challenging for the team to try new genres and new engines. *The Island: Castaway* is the result of that quest for innovation, a series which includes a mix of adventure and simulation.

Another milestone for Awem was 2011 when the company started conquering the iOS market. Although Awem's initial releases for iOS have been ports of PC games, they are also planning to release a game designed especially for these devices, *Cradle of Empires*, which Oleg says "has lots of things that were not in our previous games."

Ten by Ten

This year Awem celebrates its tenth anniversary. The best reward for the date was the first place in the contest. (see p. 27) ❄

The shift away from shooters prompted Awem to add more females to the team in order to produce the sort of crisp, beautiful, hand-drawn graphics their new titles would require.



Over the course of the last decade, Awem has gained 10 times more valuable experience, built a great, inspired team, and learned to enjoy what they are doing 100%. They were even named the Best IT-Company To Work For In Belarus 2012. Here's what some of those team members have to say about working at Awem:

"It's important for me to work where people value your ideas, where the work is really interesting and new each day. Awem gives me that chance."

Gennadi Abramovich
Senior Artist



Just having fun!

Dmitri Bychkov
Senior Designer

"Awem is the only company in Europe where so many girls work on game development."

Helen Kostina
Senior Business Development Manager

"Working for Awem provides great experience in exploring the game industry and the world. Because of the challenging work and the extremely talented people who are passionate about creating AWEsoMe games, I'm happy to be part of the Awem family!"

"Now I know that work can be your hobby and the office can be your second home."

Katherine Kazakova
Artist

Casual Connect Europe 2010

"Working at Awem offers the opportunity to improve constantly—both professionally and personally. My ideas are applied and I can see the result."

Leonid Podlyatski
Senior PR-Manager



Vadim Komkov
Design Director

"There are people who can make games and there are those who can't resist making them. My colleagues are the latter."

"Awem is about more than just interesting work, self-improvement and professional growth. It is really a second home for me."

Mary Poltinnikova
Senior Business Development Manager

Exclusive Interview

From Making Movies to Making Games

An Interview with Brian Kindregan

Interviewed by Nicholas Yanes

Brian Kindregan was raised in Boston, Massachusetts and is a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts (commonly referred to as Cal Arts), where he focused on Character Animation. He worked as a clean-up artist and animator before becoming a storyboard artist.

As a storyboarder, Kindregan worked for a number of studios including Disney, Universal, Sony Imageworks, and Cartoon Network. He has also worked on films such as *Lion King 1½* and *The Iron Giant*, and television shows such as *Johnny Bravo* and *The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy*. He directed the first two seasons of the Emmy-award-winning show *The Zula Patrol*, which aired on PBS. Kindregan also returned to Cal Arts as an instructor where he taught visual storytelling for a number of years.

Kindregan switched over to the games industry to write for BioWare's *Jade Empire* and *Mass Effect 2*. He then moved to Blizzard, where he was co-lead writer on *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*, and was the lead writer of *StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm*. He is currently lead writer on the *Diablo* development team at Blizzard.

like *Rock & Rule* and *Heavy Metal* had come out earlier in the decade and I assumed the trend would continue.

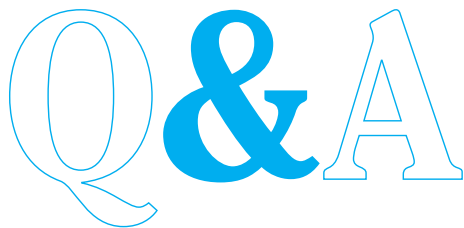
When I got into the industry, I immediately worked towards becoming a storyboard artist, which at the time was the closest thing to a storyteller who uses drawings.

NY: Cal Arts was one of the many institutions created by Walt Disney. What was it like learning in the shadow of Disney? And how do you see your work in regard to Disney's legacy?

BK: Well, Disney didn't technically create Cal Arts—but he certainly invested quite a lot of money and the talents of his artists in it. Attending Cal Arts was an amazing experience. The faculty—and the entire character animation program—were superb. But the real “secret weapon” of the place was the other students. When everyone around you is incredibly talented, hardworking and humble, it's impossible to slack off or become pleased with yourself. From the first day, I was working as hard as possible, absorbing everything I could from my fellow students.

Disney the man certainly cast a long shadow over the place: Many of the teachers had known him and most students spoke of him in reverent tones. He often took huge risks—betting the studio's future on the belief that the public appreciated great artistry—and we all admired that a great deal.

At the same time, the Cal Arts character animation department at that time had a very interesting current of rebellion to it. A faction



NICHOLAS YANES: At one point in our lives, many of us were mesmerized by a cartoon or video game and thought that we could create something similar. When did you know that you enjoyed art so much that you wanted to pursue a career in animation?

BRIAN KINDREGAN: I've been sketching as far back as I can remember. And I really enjoyed telling stories. At about the age of 15, I was consuming lots of comic books and several novels a week (usually at the expense of my math homework), but I had no idea what I could do with that interest. Then I read *The Illusion of Life* by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston. Somewhere in the middle of that book, I realized that I could tell stories with my drawings by working in animation. And the animation industry at the time seemed on the verge of exploring new types of storytelling—films



Brian Kindregan;
Lead Writer, Blizzard;
Irvine, CA

Brian Kindregan



of the students were fans of John Kricfalusi and Bob Clampett. Others were excited by more avant-garde influences. So there was an overall sense that the Disney style was too safe, out of touch.

For the final part of your question, I have learned quite a lot over the years from the Disney studios in terms of their storytelling and artistic skill. I admire so much of what the man, and the studio, achieved. But I am not a particular devotee. I like and admire a very wide range of storytellers and artists, and I have been influenced by many different sources. Disney is certainly one of those sources, but not the primary.

NY: Given your experience working in the film and gaming business, what are some things you've learned that you wish Cal Arts had prepared you for?

BK: I learned so much at Cal Arts that I can't imagine what else I could have learned while there. I think the limits on how much I learned there were mine, not the Institute's.

I certainly continued to learn after Cal Arts—a big part of being a professional artist is learning how to take criticism. I took plenty of criticism at Cal Arts, but there is a difference between a critique intended to help you make your own work better and a critique intended to bring your work closer to a director's vision. There is a startling moment of disconnect when you realize that you have to try to maintain the artistic integrity of your work—and fight for everything that you think is im-

portant—while still making it fit into the larger vision that someone else has. That is something I learned how to do after Cal Arts, and that seems correct to me. I don't think that's a skill that filmmakers in university should be developing. They are still exploring their own artistic sensibilities.

Another skill I learned was critiquing others. At Cal Arts, we critiqued each other all the time, but there was an easy familiarity about it—we all knew each other and we were there to learn. In the workplace, you must often critique others with no real idea of how they will take it. You learn techniques for getting all your points across in a dispassionate, clinical way so that it never feels personal.

Beyond that, I would just say that I continue to this day to learn about storytelling and drawing. Cal Arts gave me a great foundation for both of those skills, but neither discipline has a finish line. You can never stop developing yourself as an artist or storyteller. There is always so much more to learn.

NY: Though you worked on a lot of great movies, you switched to video game writing. What was it about video games that appealed to you more than traditional filmmaking?

BK: I still love film, but I felt like games are the forward edge of narrative exploration. While the way we tell stories in film is still evolving, I think it's a pretty advanced form with many accepted laws and rules that have been formed through hard-fought experimentation. Lots of failure and some key successes.

There is a startling moment of disconnect when you realize that you have to try to maintain the artistic integrity of your work—and fight for everything that you think is important—while still making it fit into the larger vision that someone else has.

Brian Kindregan

Game narrative on the other hand, is in its infancy. Each year there are so many technical and artistic advances that the way we tell stories changes. Think about films in 1995 and films today. How much has the storytelling/narrative changed? Now think about games in

Movie-goers watch a film to be moved by the story and characters. It is a passive experience—sit back and absorb the characters and their story. On the other hand, players sit down to play a game.

1995 and today: How different is the storytelling and narrative? I was so excited to see this crazy evolution—huge leaps and bounds with each generation of games—that I wanted to be a part of it. I went into it knowing that there are some real drawbacks. This level of experimentation and change means there will be artistic failures. Probably many.

I also knew that I was choosing a medium that some stuffy older critics would not consider a valid form of artistic/narrative expression. (Of course, the same accusation has been leveled at television, film, theatre, ballet and many others over the years. The establishment is always dismissive of the newest art form.) But in the end, the possibilities of game story were too great for me to resist.

NY: What is one of the key differences between working on films and working on games?

BK: If you mean what are the practical day-to-day differences of working in the two media, I would say that film has a much more established production method. Studios have been making films for almost 100 years, and while there have been some enormous jumps in technology that have led to different production methods, much of it has not changed in 75 years. Meanwhile, games are so new and move so fast that everything is changing all the time!

The upshot is that when you work on a film, you are very specialized and focused. You are able to work at a high level, hone your craft and ignore everything outside your area of specializations. When you work in games, you must wear many hats. You must be adaptable, flexible, curious to learn new things, and able to deal with technical hurdles. If you are fortunate enough (as I am) to work for a studio that puts an emphasis on polish, you can also hone your craft at a high level.

NY: Specifically, how do you feel writing for video games differs from writing for film?

BK: There are a great many differences. The most fundamental is that movie-goers watch a film to be moved by the story and characters. It is a passive experience—sit back and absorb the characters and their story. On the other hand, players sit down to *play* a game. They are there for the challenge of beating the game (or other players), and it is very much an active posture. They don't want to sit back and be entertained.

This does not mean that game stories are unimportant window dressing. Indeed, in any kind of game that has a narrative, the story and characters are an intrinsic part of the experience. You're much more likely to tell your friends about the character you hated and finally got to kill, or the character you liked who finally joined you on your quest, than you are to tell them about the details of a boss fight. Game story provides meaning to all the mechanics. So a big part of a game writer's job is to find out how to intertwine the story and characters with game-play—how to tell a story to someone who is in an active, impatient, adrenaline state. That's an enormous difference between the two media!

NY: You have had careers in both film and video games. What do you think sets you apart from people who dream of working in these industries but just never make it?

BK: I'd hesitate to define some characteristic of my own that is somehow special. But I will say that just about everyone I've seen make it in either industry shared one particular trait: They were too dumb to give up. It is

Diablo III

While I was working as the lead writer on *StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm*, I was approached by the *Diablo* team. They asked if I could work on *Diablo III* for a few days, and rough in the followers—the Scoundrel, the Templar, and the Enchantress. At the time the characters were only a vague idea—really a descriptive name and a combat role. For example: the Scoundrel, a crossbow wielding support unit with tricks and traps. Based on the descriptive names, I wrote out sound-sets for each—their battle cries, the things they say when they're almost dead, or what they say when they see a dangerous monster. Then I went on to write out their banter—the funny things they say when you're running around the world. For example:

Hero: Does the Thieves Guild exist in these parts?

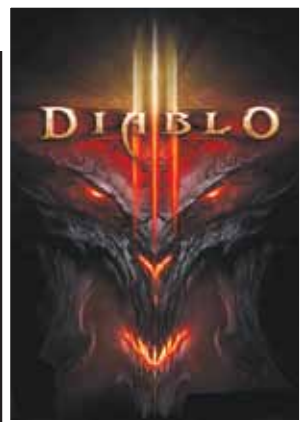
Scoundrel: There are thieves everywhere.

Hero: But are they organized?

Scoundrel: You think the Thieves Guild is organized?

I also wrote banter for the followers to exchange with each other around the fire—such as the continuing interactions where the Scoundrel steals the Templar's amulet. (He also steals Leah's ring at another point.)

All of this was done about 2 years before the game's release, and many other writers worked on the followers during that period—they added backstories, and some of the sound-sets were altered. So while much of the work I did on the followers made it into the game, I was by no means the only writer involved.



The environments in *Diablo III* demonstrate the progression of the player's journey. The first act feels dark and constricted, while the second act is open and full of mystery. As players move closer to the finale, the environments become more monumental and supernatural.



Deckard Cain is the last descendant of the Horadric mages and a source of valuable information over the years for *Diablo* players.

Brian Kindregan

very hard to get into either industry—you will be rejected, many times. And there are a million people who will tell you that you can't make a living in it, that you'll fail, that you aren't good enough, that you need connections, that there are no jobs in that industry, or that they don't want "people like you"—the list goes on.

I have seen very talented people give up because of the barriers. I have seen hard-working people falter and go try something else. I've seen creative people just stop trying. All of those traits are important, but they aren't the key ingredient. When I look around me at a film studio or a game developer, I see people who just wouldn't take *no* for an answer.

NY: You're currently the lead writer for *StarCraft II* and *Diablo*. With "casual gamers" becoming the largest portion of gaming consumers, do you think *StarCraft* or similar games will change in order to go after these consumers?

BK: In my role, I think about the best way to give the player a rich narrative experience in a vivid world. I'm not really involved in the strategic thinking about what market to go after.

The delivery system of a story can change based on the game's genre, and the content of the story can change based on the intended demographic, but the role of story in the game experience is almost immune to the particular game-type.

I think people—hardcore gamers, casual gamers, everyone in between—all like stories and characters. Humans have been telling stories since we were all sitting around a fire-pit, eating the kill from the day's hunt. Everyone reading this has told many stories over the course of his or her life. So the delivery system of a story can change based on the game's genre, and the content of the story can

change based on the intended demographic, but the role of story in the game experience is almost immune to the particular game-type.

NY: With rumors running rampant about what the next console systems will be like, as well as what the next technological leap will be for cell phones and tablet computers, many are discussing what the next breakthrough in gaming will be. What do you want the next breakthrough in gaming to be?

BK: I hate to dodge this one, but I'd say that the particulars of this or that technology advancement aren't high on the list of things I think about.

I'd say anything that helps me tell better stories in games would be welcome. So, advances in file compression and optimization have helped, in that we can now have fully voiced conversations. I think the lower barrier-to-entry for various mobile games have helped innovation quite a bit, and I'm excited to see how that affects story.

NY: The aspect of video games I enjoy the most is that one can become deeply immersed in these games, an experience I don't have with casual games. Do you think casual games will ever be able to be as immersive as games like *StarCraft* or *Diablo*?

BK: In creative fields, as soon as you say something can never be done, someone does it. So I try not to make predictions. I will say that the challenges of making an immersive casual game are very high.

It seems to me that the definition of a casual game, in the broadest sense, is one that the player can pick up and put down any time they like. By its nature, an immersive game seeks to pull you in for long periods, so that you can escape to another world and have the kind of memorable experiences that only come with full immersion. A corollary of that is the fact that when you put an immersive game down for too long, it can be difficult to get back into it.

So can a game that pulls you in that deeply still be called a casual game, simply because of its platform? ❄

StarCraft II

How do you feel the storytelling in *StarCraft II* evolved since the franchise introduction in 1998?

The storytellers of the original *StarCraft* (some of whom also worked on *Wings of Liberty*), created an incredible narrative set in a compelling universe, and they were only limited by the technology of the times. Today, there is a much greater emphasis on story. New technology and added resources have allowed us to go deeper into the motivations and contradictions of the characters, and to better render prominent plot moments. As our limits have expanded, so too have our ambitions. *Wings of Liberty* had extensive storytelling in all of its cinematics, but also an amazing amount of content in story-mode, which allowed the player to choose where to go on the ship and who to talk to. We were also able to tell story on a micro-scale that we were never able to before—we could describe the origin of a piece of equipment or a scientific upgrade, give lore and data on some of the units in the armory, and fill out some of the unexplored edges of the SC universe.

What is your favorite campaign? Do you have favorite species you prefer to play for?

It's hard to choose. I like them all! My favorite campaign right now is *Heart of the Swarm*, since that's the one I'm working on! I like playing all the races, but I have probably spent the most time playing protoss.

Was it challenging to create a story that a player wants to go through again and again? What methods have you used to achieve replayability?

Many players finish the campaign and move on to multiplayer, while others choose to replay the campaign. Because of this split, we try to make sure that the first play-through captures all the high and low points that we want the player to experience. However, we also want to reward the player who goes through the campaign multiple times.

There are many design and gameplay mechanisms to do this, but we have a narrative tool as well. We layer in more content than a player can experience in any single play-through. So there are research tech choices to be made, story choices, mission choices. There are conversations that play differently depending on the order you play the missions, and many clickable items in the environment. The newscasts vary in a number of ways—and they have ticker text that requires multiple viewings. There is so much to see and do in story-mode, and a large portion of it doesn't even show up in the first play-through.



The Terrans flex their air superiority with Battlecruisers, Vikings, and Ravens.



The new Protoss Oracles can fly in quickly to harass by Entombing mineral fields in a shield to interrupt resource gathering.



Zerg Vipers can use a blinding cloud to reduce range on enemy units.

Stop Guessing and Start Prototyping

Testing Your Way from Good to Great

My company, Game Pill, has been involved in the prototyping of software, games and children's toys for many years. While prototyping has become integral to Game Pill's operations, in my experience many companies overlook it—to their detriment. What a missed opportunity.

We were first introduced to prototyping in a formal sense when approached to create a digital version of a real-world toy for a leading toy manufacturer. At the time, we were unaware of the benefits of prototyping, but in seeing that project through to fruition, we discovered prototyping for ourselves—and we have never looked back.

PLAN:

Decide What You Want to Create

Before you can create any worthwhile game or software you must agree (as an individual or team) on what you would like to create. Here are the basic steps to get you started, along with a real-world example of a prototype we have developed.

» **Establish Requirements** Every software, interactive, and game product has requirements that vary, and that in some cases, contradict other requirements. Anyone who has sat in on a finance meeting can attest that the marketing, technical and sales teams often butt heads due to conflicting goals. Establishing requirements from a business, marketing, functional and technical standpoint are important steps in the planning process—steps that help to ensure that the end product is saleable, marketable and, above all else, functional (and fun to play).

» **Determine Functionality** What does it do? What is it? **EXAMPLE:** For the purpose of this article we will use the example of our in-production app named *Hair Do or Hair Don't*. It is an app that al-

lows mobile users to test-drive different hairdos prior to committing to an actual hairstyle. They get to see the results, as well as share the results, and ask for feedback and opinions.

» **Choose a Platform** What platform will you be using? Will this be for mobile, PC, or both? Will this be a toy? You must pick your platform early on. **EXAMPLE:** We are going to be using the iPhone platform as it is the perfect fit for our target demographic.

» **Select Development Tools** What will you use to create your product? For gaming this is usually a mixture of art and programming tools/languages such as AS3, Objective C, Unity 3d, 3ds Max, etc. **EXAMPLE:** We will be using Objective C and Photoshop for development.

» **Define the Target User or Customer** Who is your target audience? You must study your target with user research or group forums. **EXAMPLE:** We are targeting all people who want to try a hairstyle before actually trying out a hairstyle physically. As a second-

ary audience, we are targeting people who want to send their friends funny pictures of themselves sporting an interesting hairdo. We anticipate that the average age of our users will be 25-45.

» **Develop Use Case Scenarios** A use case scenario explains how a typical user would interact with your product **EXAMPLES:**

- Initiate App
- Choose picture or take picture of yourself or a friend
- Choose from a pre-populated list of eras ('80s, '90s, etc.)
- Choose a hairstyle from that era
- Choose a color
- Save to library
- Email to a friend or post to Facebook with a question

» **Develop Monetization Goals for the Product (if necessary)** Early on in the prototyping stage, revenue options should be explored as well as marketing goals. **EXAMPLE:** We will gain revenue through expansion packs and in-app advertising for hair products and the like.

Examples of storyboards for *Hair Do, Hair Don't*



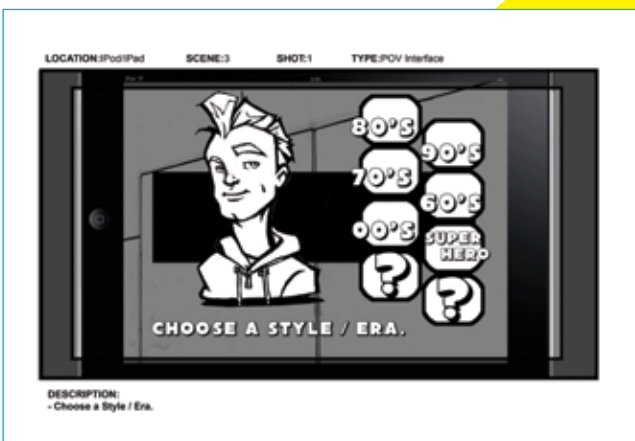
by Michael Sorrenti;
President,
Game Pill Interactive;
Aurora, ON



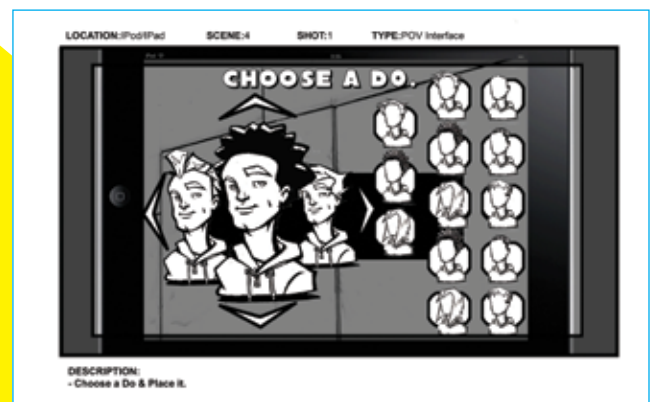
A sample of the home screen.



How a user will use the app to take a picture.



A user will choose the era of styles they would like to browse.



A user will choose a hair do form that era and adjust it to the picture.



The user will choose a color or tint for the hairstyle.



The user can then choose to save or save and post to their social networks for advice on whether to *Hair Do* or *Hair Don't*.

PREPARE:

Decide How You Want to Prototype

Now that you know what you want to create, you must decide how you would like to prototype it. There are many different ways to prototype, ranging from basic (a pencil-and-paper storyboard, a flowchart) to sophisticated (a functional prototype with key features or a full prototype with all features). Which prototype is right for your project depends on a number of factors:

- » **Determine Characteristics** You must determine the characteristics of your prototype, including:
 - Who is the audience? Is the prototype solely for internal use or external use as well? Who will be reviewing the prototype?
 - What is the goal? Will the prototype be conceptual or useable?
 - What is the style? Will it be interactive, passive, or will it require an in-person presentation?
 - What is the medium? Will it be physical (on paper or video) or digital (a useable piece of software)?

EXAMPLE: Our prototype will be reviewed by hairdressers initially. It will be usable and interactive with limited functionality. It will be a downloadable app for the iPhone that is easy for the test group to load and test.

- » **Choose a Method** There are many options when prototyping, including:
 - Wireframes—very effective when explaining simple systems.
 - Storyboards—effective to convey a concept to stakeholders; cost effective.
 - Video—best for when there is a human element or when you would like to show a two-way interaction (example: showing how a child will interact with an alternate reality physical and digital toy).
 - Digital (useable with a computer, smart-phone or other digital device)—best for games and software when we want to determine game-play and find the best possible use cases by studying how users interact

with the flow or UI of the written software, etc.

EXAMPLE: We will be going the digital route.

- » **Choose a Tool** The tool is usually dependent on the method chosen, but here are some common tools that we use (tools can be combined where deemed appropriate):
 - Paper and pencil: a great, low-cost way to begin a concept.
 - Photoshop: great tool for adding more detail, for creating UI, etc.
 - MS-Word: great for written concepts.
 - MS-PowerPoint: great for prototypes that are being presented.
 - Programming in Flash, Unity 3d, etc.: our preferred method; it allows us to offer audio, visual and user interaction points within the prototype.

EXAMPLE: We are going the programming route for *Hair Do or Hair Don't*.

BENEFITS OF PROTOTYPING

In order to understand why you should be prototyping, you must first understand the associated benefits. The overriding benefit, of course, is that prototyping increases the chance of producing a successful and polished product. In addition, here is just a partial list of the ancillary benefits I have encountered over the years:

PROTOTYPING PROVES OR DISPROVES ASSUMPTIONS.

We all make assumptions about why our project or product will be the next great _____. Creating a prototype before committing fully to your concept allows you to prove or disprove the validity of your concept in a controlled way.

PROTOTYPING CLARIFIES REQUIREMENTS. Requirements often change during the development cycle of a product. Prototyping ensures that requirements are defined more fully.

PROTOTYPING HELPS SET EXPECTATIONS. We all have our own expectations, and in many organizations, these expectations come from a variety of stakeholders who sometimes have conflicting interests (accountants, sales people, marketing, developers, etc.). Setting expectations early on with a prototype can help avoid problems later in the development cycle.

PROTOTYPING HELPS TO IDENTIFY ISSUES OR GAPS EARLY ON. Seeing a concept in action allows stakeholders

and developers to fill in gaps or identify potential issues early on. These issues can relate specifically to almost any branch of a company: legal, marketing, development, etc. For example, a media company may have a great idea for an app featuring a character that flies. However, the branding department may determine that this is "off brand" as the character is supposed to be afraid of heights. These are the types of issues that a company wants to flush out early on.

PROTOTYPING INTRODUCES A USER PERSPECTIVE EARLY IN THE PROCESS. With a working prototype, developers and stakeholders can get perspective via focus groups and internal testing early on. This allows the team to shift direction as needed, based on user feedback.

PROTOTYPING MINIMIZES RISKS. When prototyping, there is less risk of allocating time and budget to a flawed concept. The teams can then focus on winning ideas and weed out lesser ideas more quickly.

PROTOTYPING MINIMIZES COSTS. Seeing a game in action early on allows developers to innovate and make revisions early in the development process, thus limiting expenditures on flawed functionality or concepts.



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Seeing players and users fumble with functionality may be hard to watch, but it provides a valuable learning opportunity. It isn't always pretty, but it allows you to determine, with some granularity, which parts are pretty.

DESIGN:

Create the Prototype

With planning and preparation complete, it is time to create. This is usually the most gratifying phase of the process, when you see your ideas take a physical form. Here are the simple steps and considerations for the creation of your first prototype.

» **Select Design Criteria** There must be visual, sound and interaction criteria for your product. If your product is physical, there are additional criteria as well, including:

- User flow: Users should feel in control at all times, especially in a game.
- Performance: Memory should be optimized, and the game should work on the hardware and platform.
- Logical Categories: Information should be easy to navigate, and progress should be immediately apparent.
- Ease of use: The best games and software are easy to use. A user should be able to play and progress.

EXAMPLE: Our sample app should enable users to easily take a picture, mock up a hairdo, choose a color and send it to others.

» **Create the Design** Once planning is in place, the design can then be created using the tools and methods chosen previously. Design includes all items that the user can see and interact with.

» **Build the Prototype** Once design is established, the prototype can be built with storyboards or by actually programming.

RESULTS:

Decide What to Do Next

Once the prototype is complete, it must be tested by stakeholders. Stakeholders include marketing, programmers and all other creative and non-creative departments involved in the prototyping. In addition, it is helpful to validate what the stakeholders tell you by sharing the prototype with actual users. You can get this additional feedback simply by presenting the prototype (one-on-one or in focus groups) and asking follow-up questions. In more developed cases, you'll probably want to allow users to interact with the software or product and give feedback based on their experience.

This is arguably the most important step in the prototyping process inasmuch as it allows you to discover what is wrong or right with your design. Some feedback will inevitably be negative—perhaps even a little hard to listen to—but you must remind yourself that the feedback is the reason you have built the prototype in the first place. Recognizing shortfalls will allow you to refine and modify the design and improve upon it. Seeing players and users fumble with functionality may be hard to watch, but it provides a valuable learning opportunity. It isn't always pretty, but it allows you to determine, with some granularity, which parts are pretty. The goal is to take what's good and enhance it further, while removing or tweaking the parts that are not working. Making the right adjustments is where greatness comes from.

Ultimately, you must transfer what you have learned from the prototype into next steps. Depending on what you've learned, it may be necessary to create an additional prototype for further testing; or if the prototype is fully functional and prototyping is deemed to be successful, the prototype itself could be refined into the final product.

Try, Try Again

The nature of great design is trial-and-error mixed with refinement. Prototyping makes this a lot easier to achieve and record. You now have all the tools at your disposal to get your ideas into one place, convey them to others, and then review and refine into a more polished and even better final product. I look forward to seeing what you all come up with. ❄

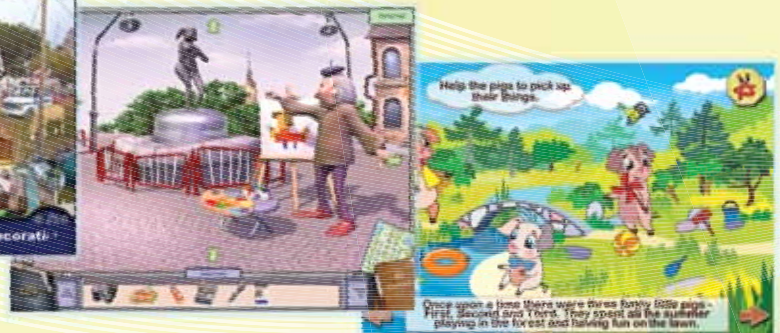
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Getting Out Ahead of the Catastrophes

A Case for Tiered Development

A catastrophe is always just around the corner. Every development cycle will have several major events that will cause you to put your hands up in despair.

If you speak to almost anyone who has been in this industry for over ten years, they will tell you similar stories about how it was in the Wild West of video game development. When I first started making games a little over 13 years ago, I had no idea how drastically things were going to change. Back then the word “producer” wasn’t part of my vocabulary, and our game’s schedule consisted of the completion date and not much more. To get a game finished, we simply put our heads down and worked as hard as we could with little idea of what we should be focusing on for the best results. As the deadline drew nearer, it was usually a case of looking at what we had and trying to package it as best we could to make a shippable product—sometimes with surprisingly good results, and other times with less desirable outcomes.

A lot of time has passed since then, and our industry has started to mature. Our working environment seems almost unrecognizable: Pensions, healthcare, scrum/waterfall, schedules, design documents and task-tracking are part of daily life for most of us. Despite these changes, it seems our products are still in the grip of chaos. We don’t know if our games will be worth pursuing until we are so far into development that shelving them will cost a lot more than it should. Invariably, we seem unable to complete all the features we start building, wasting development time and chipping away at people’s mo-

tivation. I don’t think it has to be like that, and for many of us (particularly those involved in smaller companies) we simply can’t afford for it to be like that.

There are several practices that I think can help keep us from the brink of catastrophe, but the first thing to realize is that a catastrophe is always just around the corner. You might have to bring in your launch date, or your team could be cannibalized and become smaller than you planned, or technology might not work as expected, or features might not test well with users. Every development cycle will have several major events that will cause you to put your hands up in despair.

There is no way to eliminate in-development setbacks and challenges, but there is an approach to game-making that can minimize their impact. It’s called tiered development.

A Tiered Approach to Development

On a recent project, I worked as the lead designer on a game that underwent a great deal of change to its schedule and team. However, during the planning stages I developed a couple of practices that helped our team stay on track.

First, I broke the game story down to its important events and locations and then imagined what would happen if the game was cut to a quarter of its size. How would the story still function if I only had 25 percent of the locations to play with? Perhaps some elements of the story could be removed altogether, or perhaps some elements could be presented via dialogue (rather than actually seeing or playing them).

I then performed the same exercise for cuts down to 50 percent and 75 percent. However, the key difference was that instead of starting at 100 percent and cutting to 50, I started with the small 25 percent game and put items back in to bring it up to 50. I added to the 50 percent game to bring it back up to 75. I had to write some alternate dialogue lines that would allow for the different structures to function, but the extra work was inconsequential. Because this was a story game, I had to ensure that the story would retain some semblance of structure, but the basic approach can be applied to any game of any size. Essentially you are stripping the project to its very core, and in most cases quite some distance beyond that.

This approach gives you the first building blocks for a tiered development system. People can start working in earnest on that core 25 percent and move on to the next 25 percent once the original core is complete. This process is fundamentally different from the way everyone seems to do it these days; instead of being compelled to make cuts to a large, almost-finished product, you are building on top of a smaller complete one. Unexpected cuts won't destroy the structure of your game or make new work for people who suddenly need to patch the holes left by the gaping wounds torn in the side of your game-flow. Plus the game will be a smoother experience (more on that later).

Imagine you are applying this methodology to the development of a game called *Drive-by Shooting*. Your core 25 percent experience might be stripped of everything apart from the driving. However, assuming there is some skill and fun to be had in the driving, you might make targets automatically die when you drive very close to them to help people get a feel for what the intention is from the game. The game you are making might have been envisioned as *GTA*, but at 25 percent of the development time you will just have a series of singular roads to drive down with targets that you need to drive very close to in order to kill. These roads would become pieces of a larger map that would be built in later stages of development, and the control of your car would be the same control you would be looking for in the fully developed game.

The Problem with Content Complete

At the start of a traditional production cycle, all of a game's features are usually turned into tasks and assigned to small strike teams. These teams might have several features to complete during development or just one. As production starts, the teams take their tasks and start galloping for the finish line, with smaller deliverables along the way to demonstrate predictability via the progress made on each feature. The problems start arising because of dependencies, and then they solidify into wasted work when cuts or redesigns occur.

Often you test a feature as it gets developed, then make adjustments as best you can. Once the feature is thought to be done, you leave it and move on to the next one. The trouble is that even when it is done, it really isn't, because there will be many elements missing that the feature depends on—the UI might be missing, for example, or the main character's animation might not be final, or the enemies you are fighting might not yet have the ability to die. In such situations, all that can be done is to make a best guess that the feature is good enough and then revisit it once the other elements are in place.

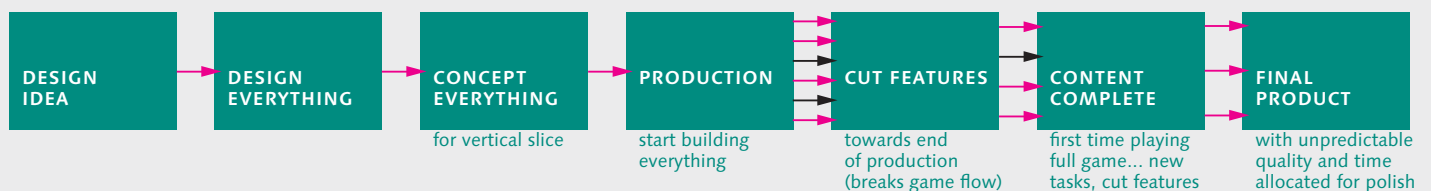
As the project continues, more and more features get added to the stack of elements that will get revisited for final sign-off. This amorphous blob of tasks is often referred to as "polish," which by definition is totally unquantifiable. As the end of the project draws near, the leadership team is overwhelmed with reviewing the content as all the strike teams finish their work and the game is viewable as a whole for the first time. That's when the leadership team becomes a bottleneck. Before long, developers see a huge spike in new, unforeseen tasks, throwing what appeared to be a smoothly running project into total disarray. These new tasks quite often result in the end date of the game getting pushed out, which then results in features being cut to get the game back on track. This means wasted work, destroyed motivation and an uneven game.

The problem with this traditional approach to development should be obvious: We start building all the components at once and then try and bring them together as we go. Imagine trying to build a house that way. It would be like having everyone

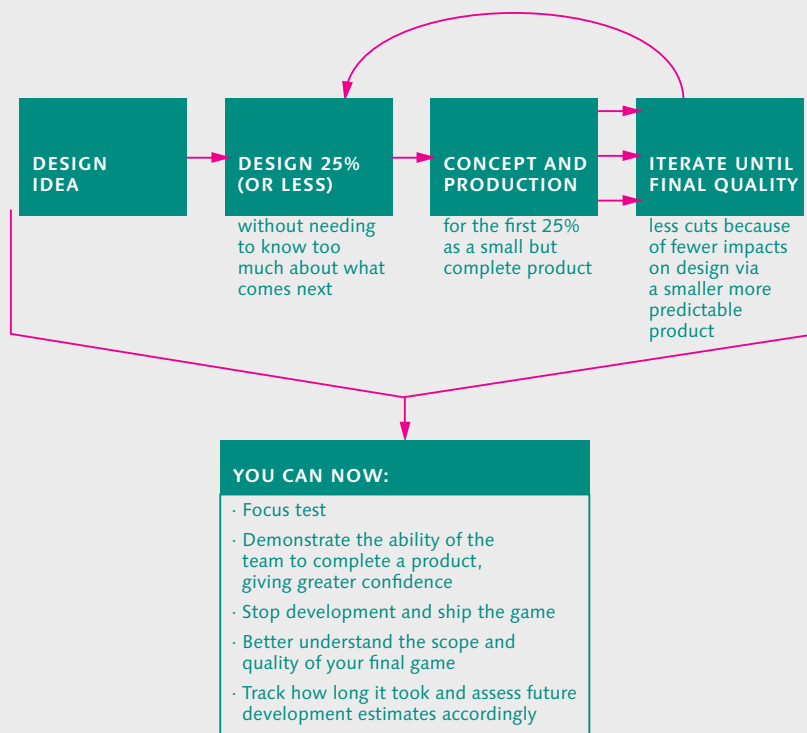


by James Barnard; Indie Developer, *Springloaded*; Singapore

TRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Tiered development enables you to deliver a more polished product that is almost guaranteed to ship on time in some form.



turn up at the building site and trying to shove everything together as soon as soon as it is ready—as if you could install the windows before the walls are even in place.

The Tiered Solution

Using tiered development, a project is constructed more linearly. You build a small, complete component of the game to final quality, complete with menus, game-flow, etc., and build on top of this small, fully-formed product from there. This isn't to say the traditional phases of development should be ignored, but in tiered development you would have preproduction and production phases for each tier.

Imagine how this might work for our *Drive-by Shooting* game. The first tier's core content (driving down a road trying to get close to your targets) could be considered a fun little game on its own. All of the elements that would not change for the fully-developed version of the game—including the title screen, the pause menu, and the sound—can be worked on up to a final level. If there are elements that would not be relevant in future tiers, you do your best to minimize them. But polish and bug-testing should be approached as if this were a final product.

Once you have a polished first-tier experience, your driving mechanic should be fun and your VFX and other things should be sufficiently polished so that you could ship the game. Even with just a small percentage of your features finished together, you

lessen the load on the leadership team at the end of the project. You also have something you can focus-test a lot earlier than you could if you were working in a standard game development cycle. Level designers also now have a baseline set of tuned mechanics they can use to start building more content. Your team will feel a sense of achievement, and investors/management will get an idea of the quality of the final product—giving them more trust in the development team (or more reason for concern).

From a design standpoint, you only need to have a rough plan of how your game will fit together, a kind of ideal product in bullet points. You then focus in on that core 25 percent and start designing it in more detail. This not only keeps you from spending design time on things you're still figuring out, it also reduces the length of that dreaded design period in which the rest of the team is desperate to get going on something tangible.

Coordinating Tiered Development

A vital tool in making tiered development work is the "Feature Progression Sheet." Essentially this document is a table of features and assets cross-referenced with the levels and game modes where they appear. The Feature Progression Sheet plays a big part in allowing you to make your game in stages.

With a list of features along one axis and a list of levels/modes along the other, you can mark where

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in the game you want to introduce a feature or element (such as an enemy) for the first time, and then make a note of each subsequent use after that. Sure, it is hard to know exactly where these things will appear, but working with your design team should

allow you to get a pretty good idea of what everyone is thinking. Such a practice allows you to easily see how much value you are getting from each feature through reuse and how evenly spread your features are. You can then decide to cut features or ask designers to try and make more use of them.

In the case of tiered development, it is possible to map this Feature Progression Sheet back onto the core tiers of your game. Then you can match core features with core levels and so on. For example, if *Drive-by Shooting* has six sections in which the player would control a hovercraft, and only one of those sections appears in

a tier one area, you might choose to cut that single section, or postpone it to become part of a later tier. The net result of all of this is that you have a feature set and game structure that are prioritized in unison, which enables you to start getting the best from your development.

Towards the end of each tier you will revisit the Feature Progression Sheet and probably make big changes to what is remaining. You might even scrap your original plans for the remaining tiers and come up with something else. All this is fine so long as you aren't throwing away existing work. Think how much better this methodical approach is than the traditional alternative, when so often we pour effort into features that in the end are barely used, or we spread the focus so wide that nothing gets done to a satisfactory level until too late in the development cycle.

A More Precise, Methodical Approach

Tiered development may take away some of the perceived freedom game developers like to have, as you are essentially locking down certain elements and hoping subsequent ones will fit over the top as you go. The truth, however, is that the tiered method should make it easier to piece together the elements of your game cohesively. Rather than having a pile of things that are in flux until the end of development, you are building and tuning new features on

I would always prefer to ship a smaller, solid product than a larger, slightly lumpy one, and while most people agree with this, it doesn't feel like we do enough to make it possible.

top of an unmoving baseline (ideally). This means the number of things the designers have to juggle and adjust is reduced, allowing for a more precise and methodical approach to adding your new content.

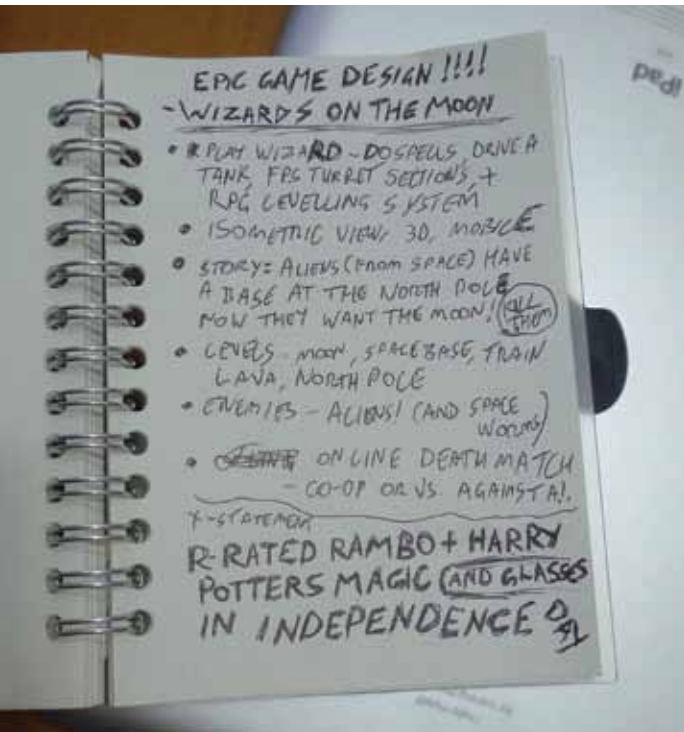
Obviously you have to be somewhat flexible, but I do believe it is possible to make key decisions or commitments and stick with them. Refining elements of games is always a better choice than throwing things away. In the years I have been working in the games industry, I have seen countless moments in which we have discarded game features and gone back to the drawing board, only to be faced with a whole new set of problems once we have redeveloped the new version. If you can't refine something to the point where it is workable, what makes you think that the next attempt will fare any better?

Conclusion

Originally I started thinking about tiered development because of deadlines, and because no matter how much time I had to develop a game in the past, it never seemed to be enough. I would always prefer to ship a smaller, solid product than a larger, slightly lumpy one, and while most people agree with this, it doesn't feel like we do enough to make it possible.

As mentioned previously, I employed an early version of this methodology for a recent project. During that cycle, our team never reached full staffing—and to make matters worse, our end date was brought in twice, essentially cutting our development time in half! However, we still managed to get through everything relatively unscathed.

So what's not to like? Tiered development enables you to deliver a more polished product that is almost guaranteed to ship on time in some form. It also maximizes your development time as you reduce the chances of developing content that will later be cut. Fewer cuts mean better team morale, which also contributes to building a better product. It becomes easier for people to make decisions as they only work on a smaller piece of the product at any one time. Users can start playing your game sooner, allowing you more opportunity to respond to feedback. Having high quality versions of your game early on builds confidence across the board. ❄



WHAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW

about the mobile game market in Russia

Fastest Growing Countries by Revenue (year to date)

iOS

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1. Japan 22% | 2. Russia 17% | 3. US 13% | 4. France 12% |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|

GOOGLE
PLAY

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1. Brazil 88% | 2. Japan 23% | 3. Russia 20% | 4. US 19% |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----------|

App Store Revenue
in Russia

+115%

May 2011 – May 2012

Russian
iOS Game
Market Volume

\$27 mln
in 2011

20 Top Grossing
iOS Games Make

\$3 mln

per month
October, 2012

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Assume You're Going Viral

Five Considerations When Choosing a Database for Your Social Game

Every social game developer's dream is to release a game that goes viral and shoots to the top of the download charts. Staying at the top can be just as hard as getting there, of course, which is why it is essential to think about infrastructure requirements to support growth even before your game goes live. One especially important component of that infrastructure—for any social game—is its database, which has a major impact on your ability to grow.

The key issues for managing data in social games are these:

1. Easy scalability
2. High performance (with consistently low latency and high throughput)
3. Low cost
4. Always-on availability
5. Data model flexibility

In light of those requirements, the capabilities of NoSQL databases fit social games particularly well. NoSQL is a newer class of database management systems that have emerged to enable the cost-effective management of the data behind today's modern Web and mobile applications. There are many choices to pick from, however, and it's not always obvious how to select the right one. Here's some help.

Consideration 1: Easy Scalability

When a game does go viral, it needs to be able to scale immediately to accommodate a large number of users. On that happy day, the last thing you want is to fight with complicated scaling procedures. There isn't time to hire new ops resources, deal with unforeseen issues, or make changes to your game to support scaling.

Case in point: EA's *The Simpsons: Tapped Out*. Following an incredibly successful launch, the game hit No. 2 on the App Store immediately after it was made available. But just four days later the app was pulled from the App Store altogether. Users experienced long wait times and connection problems—a direct result of the massive growth. EA didn't publish exact details, but reviews of player complaints made it apparent that the game's database infrastructure was simply overwhelmed by and was unable to support the surge in users.

In stark contrast, OMGPOP launched *Draw Something*, and just a short time later the application went viral. Like *Tapped Out*, *Draw Something* was extremely successful from the start, but unlike *Tapped Out* it just kept on growing—to 50 million downloads in 50 days—without any scaling issues.

In order to avoid scalability problems when your game hits it big, look for the following in your database:

- The database should scale to 50, 100 or more nodes. Most NoSQL databases have no problem operating in a small 1-5 node cluster, but operating on a 50 or 100 node cluster is far more complex—and not every NoSQL database is up to the task.



- Look for a database that doesn't require you to make any changes to your application when scaling. With a NoSQL database, you shouldn't have to do application level-sharding (manually partitioning your database into multiple databases) to enable your application to adjust to growth in your user base.
- You need a database that provides effective auto-sharding. A database should use a sharding approach that balances the load evenly across the cluster. Having a cluster with "hot spots" will cause big scaling problems that will sap the performance of your game and increase your costs.
- Finally, look for a database that provides online, on-demand cluster-sizing. Adding or removing capacity should be a single, simple operation when you're growing from 1 to 25 to 50 nodes or more.

Consideration 2: High Performance

Social games need to be responsive and perform actions quickly. Otherwise, players will get frustrated and abandon the game. Players are demanding, and there is a growing body of research that confirms high dropout rates for even slightly unresponsive applications.

Document and key-value NoSQL databases generally support very high performance. They keep related data in a single physical location in memory and on disk (in document form), making it faster to read and write data than relational databases. Look for a NoSQL database that consistently provides sub-millisecond latency for reads and writes, at scale. "Consistently" should mean 99 percent of the time, regardless of the mix of reads and writes.

Consideration 3: Low Cost

Most social games are free-to-play, but they still cost money to run. For most games, only a small percentage of users ever pay anything to play the game. As a result, it is important to have a low-cost, scalable database tier—one that doesn't create undue software or hardware expense and that promises linear cost increases as the number of game players grows. You'll want one that requires minimal operational support as well.

To minimize costs during the pre-viral days, many developers start off by leveraging free community editions of open source database projects that run on cloud platforms like Amazon. But be careful that you spend time thinking through how your software, hardware, and operational management costs will scale as your game grows in popularity. There are big differences in throughput (database operations/sec/server) between databases, and by the time you go viral it will be too late to make changes.

Consideration 4: Always-on Availability

Like most applications these days, social games are played around the world 24/7/365. When a game goes down for maintenance, players become frustrated and the game developer loses money. Ideally, you never want your game to be off-line for hardware upgrades, software upgrades, failed servers, etc.

Look for a NoSQL database that allows you to do online upgrades to the latest revision of software. The database should allow you to easily remove a node from the cluster for maintenance without affecting the availability of the cluster. It should handle online backup and restore. Also, look for a database that provides database disaster recovery support through cross-datacenter replication.

Consideration 5: Data Model Flexibility

The social gaming market is fiercely competitive, and players have lots of choices in the games they play. Social gaming is still relatively new, and everyone is still learning, so it is critical to execute fast iterations of a new game to get the dynamics right. It is just as important to iterate quickly after you go viral to maintain player engagement and grow the player base. Game developers can't tolerate long design cycles or long release cycles.

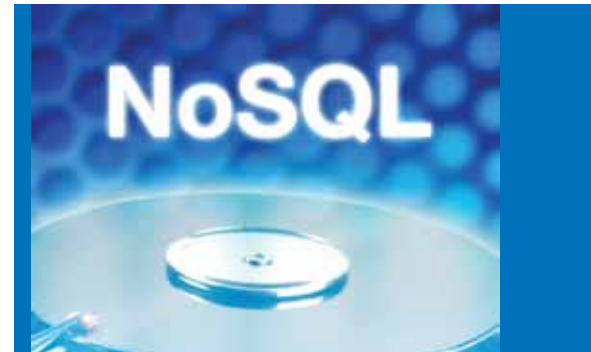
Key-value and document-oriented NoSQL databases provide a very flexible data model that allows you to make changes quickly. JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) documents are text-based and derived from the JavaScript scripting language for representing simple data structures and associative arrays, called objects. These documents can be stored in either type of NoSQL database and provide a schema-less data model that is extremely flexible and easy to change. If you want to add new data types, just add the data to the appropriate documents. There is no need to call a DBA, modify your schema, move your database from the old schema to the new, or change your application.

Get It Right Upfront

Remember: Social games are designed to be viral—so you should plan accordingly. The sheer number of users actively playing games makes it difficult to scale the total system, so make sure you have the database infrastructure in place to support rapid growth. In the end, your choice of database technology will be one of the most important decisions you will make. ❄



by Bob Wiederhold;
CEO, Couchbase;
Mountain View, CA



Small Screens Provide Big Plays For Social Games

Four Lessons in Mobile Porting



Few devices have transformed as rapidly over the past 20-some years as mobile phones. These sleek, compact devices are more powerful than ever; capable of bringing thousands of games to your fingertips while keeping you connected to friends and family, information and other forms of digital entertainment.

The combination of power, portability, massive reach, and easy application distribution has disrupted the gaming industry. Many industry analysts believe mobile games will be the fastest growing sector in the video game industry over the next five years. In fact, SuperData expects the mobile gaming market to hit \$7.5 billion by 2015, up from \$2.7 billion.

Of course, change has always been rapid in the casual games industry. At GameHouse, we've mastered and re-mastered delivery of casual gaming experiences across multiple platforms and various screens, including mobile. We've distributed more than 3,000 casual games and launched more than 75 mobile games on smart phones and feature phones. In recent years, much of our game development focus has been in the social gaming sphere, where we've brought a range of games like *Collapse! Blast* and *Slot-o-rama* to Facebook. But yet another new market has emerged—one that is primed for smaller game companies to extend their social games to screens that fit in the palm of your hand.

Many gaming companies struggle with their mobile strategy as they attempt to fit old, maybe even dull blades into new razors. Bringing a social game

into the mobile world is not a drag-and-drop affair, nor do free-to-play games on any screen diminish the value-exchange people expect for their time.

To win mobile, developers must understand and master several core competencies when launching a game on the smallest screen—design, development, distribution and discovery—all while keeping the game-play fun and engaging. We studied each of these areas before making the jump into cross-platform mobile gaming and can share a few lessons we learned when building *Collapse! Blast Mobile*.

Lesson One: Design for Fingertips and Fair Play

Today's social games often appear on 14-inch-plus HD computer screens, where players navigate the experience with a mouse or keyboard. When bringing a social game to a mobile phone, developers must confine the game-play experience to 2x3 inches of real estate controlled by fingertips rather than cursors.

This is nothing new for mobile developers—to-day's screen sizes are luxurious compared to the feature phones of yesteryear. But social game developers face troublesome trade-offs in preserving the essence of "full-screen" game-play experience when going mobile. For instance, when designing our mobile game for *Collapse! Blast*, we quickly recognized that we needed to reduce the number of rows and columns of blocks due to limited screen real estate—it's tough to replicate the accuracy of a mouse point-

er by tapping your finger on blocks that are far less than half the size!

But *Collapse! Blast Mobile* is a socially-connected game, and scores, leader boards and other elements integrate back to the Facebook-version. We had to keep the playing field fair for a mobile player who doesn't even have access to the same number of blocks to break. The most important thing is to ensure that the game "feels right" by tailoring and tuning the game for the dynamics of each platform. In our case, we decided to modify the scoring profile of the mobile version so that an individual player will achieve roughly equivalent scores on either platform. Because the results remain fairly consistent relative to a player's skill level, she shouldn't even notice that the game boards are actually different sizes.

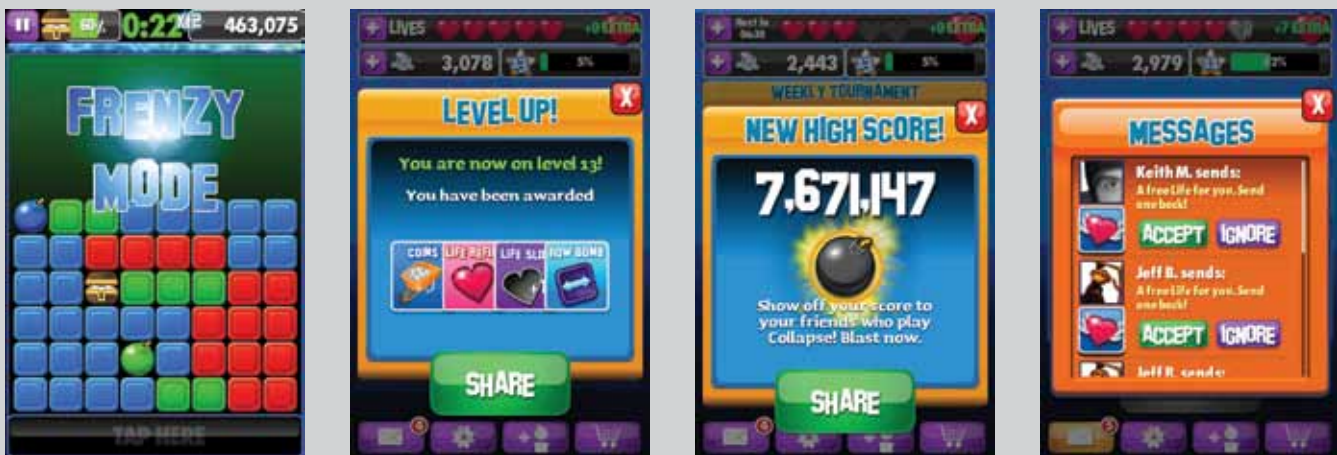
ett—have been well received by both Android and iOS users.

But Android is complicated. Android devices don't offer consistent performance characteristics, so game play may vary significantly by device. Distribution is more fragmented as well: Hundreds of carriers distribute Android devices, many offering purchasing options outside of the Android Marketplace that have their own distribution, promotion and payment integration requirements. Things should improve as devices mature and distribution stabilizes, but the Android world will likely remain complex for many years to come.

HTML5 seeks to sidestep these complexities altogether by providing the ability of coding once and deploying everywhere. It offers the potential to transform game development and enable deployment of



by Ken Murphy; VP of Studios, GameHouse; Seattle, WA



Lesson Two: Master Mobile Development and Distribution

Another dilemma for developers is this: What mobile platform should you build a game on?

Often, developers choose to first develop mobile games on iPhone because: 1) it reaches a massive audience; and 2) it is relatively stable and predictable (one platform, only a few devices, one app store). There is still a strong case to be made for this approach, especially during initial forays into cross-platform development. But as platforms like Android continue to mature and gain share, developers will soon have more options—and in some cases more difficult choices—to address the growing mobile market.

Android celebrated its one billionth app download earlier this year. Android already reaches a wide audience and is growing rapidly. By nearly all analyst estimates, Android's market share will pass iOS by 2015. Some of our most popular mobile games—*Doodle Jump*, *Delicious*, and *Mortimer Beck-*

true cross-platform games experiences, which is why big players with deep pockets are investing in this technology. That's the good news. The bad news is that HTML5 still has a way to go in terms of its ability to deliver the level of audio and visual polish that top-tier social and mobile games need. It will clearly continue to improve, but how long it will take—and whether it will ever fully catch up to the ever-expanding graphics and processing demands driven by a super-charged, hyper-competitive game industry—is an open question.

So in the near term, there is still a lot of benefit to building native apps. Building iOS is fairly straightforward, but building for Android means tackling device and distribution fragmentation.

There are a myriad of technical solutions vying to help reduce this complexity: Unity, Marmalade, MOAI—the list goes on, with dozens of SDKs and libraries offering a range of frameworks designed to bring developers closer to a write-once, deploy-anywhere world. Each requires a learning curve and a degree of commitment to stick with the program

in a games-as-a-service industry with ongoing iteration of your titles once they are live.

For our first cross-platform launch, GameHouse employed proprietary in-house technologies to deal with platform fragmentation. We approached this with a three-tiered solution:

- The first tier is a game development environment that maps an extensive list of game performance factors—like frame rate, latency, accelerometer sensitivities and more—to a standard set of parameters that we establish for each device. This process improves the consistency of our games across a wide range of devices and improves our speed to market on profile devices.

The most important thing is to ensure that the game “feels right” by tailoring and tuning the game for the dynamics of each platform.



- The second tier is a packaging system that matches optimal game-builds to a database of over 2,500 device and carrier combinations. This process allows us to rapidly deploy our games across hundreds of carriers and thousand of devices.
- The third tier glues key elements of our social and mobile games together. The system leverages social profiles via tools like Facebook Connect to match user accounts and keep key game data like scores and entitlements in sync across platforms.

None of this is rocket science per se, but it takes resources and commitments to bring these types of systems online, and more importantly to maintain and optimize them over time. It's not easy, but it's the price of admission to the wilder side of the social and mobile party.

Lesson Three: Keep Syncing from Sinking Your Mobile Distribution

Launching games that bridge social and mobile distribution is one thing. Tackling the impacts on our day-to-day operations adds a whole new set of wrinkles to the game development and distribution process. By the time we launched *Collapse! Blast* on iOS, we already had lots of experience optimizing games on social and mobile game operations separately, but not with keeping them in sync. Social games are in a constant state of iteration. It's not uncommon for us to push multiple feature releases each week. That's tougher to pull off with mobile, and it requires a thoughtful approach to the structure of a mobile app.

We tackle this issue on three levels as well. First, we are very careful about how much of the game experience needs to be identical, and we limit the need to synchronize whenever possible. Second, we look for every opportunity to deliver online content updates that don't require delivery of a new set of game bits from the carrier. Finally, we will push updated “bits” through our distribution partners in situations where our first two approaches can't deliver the game experience we need.

Lesson Four: Discoverability to Download Is Just a Numbers Game

Once distributed, developers often find another set of challenges in the ever-growing mobile app market: discoverability.

Developing a great game isn't enough anymore—the competition is too fierce, and developers need to be proactive in helping people find their games on mobile devices. Top 25 and category lists are essential, since people often use them as their first stop when looking for new content.

These lists typically sort applications based on popularity (past 24-hour downloads) and total following (overall active users). We've found that distributing a game on Thursday, with heavy promotion through the weekend, can help lift games on top 25 and category lists. Weekends often lift mobile app downloads by about 20 percent, and by timing the launch of a new release just right, developers can build organic traffic to the app. Natural search is also important, so we pay close attention to keyword and description SEO tactics when marketing our games.

In addition to these traditional channels, we are very excited about the continued growth of the Facebook mobile app and its growing ability to make social games easier to find on mobile devices. By mid-2012, Facebook already had more than 543 million users accessing its mobile app each month, an increase of 67 percent year-over-year. That means that nearly 57 percent of Facebook's total user base accesses the service from a mobile device. Facebook lets you use the same JavaScript SDK across Web and mobile, so integration of Facebook-connected native mobile apps within the mobile Facebook environment is fairly seamless.

Our tools align perfectly with Facebook's mobile features and will help us increase the discoverability of the social games we offer on mobile platforms. Players will be able to transition into our games no matter how they access Facebook, and their leader boards, scores and entitlements will stay in sync. This is important because this is brand new territory within the tech industry. We are finding that our platform can optimize design, development, distribution and discoverability on a global level. ❄

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What Happens in *DoubleDown* *Casino*... Gets Shared

Inside the World's Largest Virtual Casino



What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, right?

Well, not anymore. Not with the advent of social casino games, anyway.

The growing popularity of casual games on social and mobile platforms has redefined many casino experiences, which are no longer based only on cash prizes. In fact, casinos have become more than fixed destinations for people to visit in person now that the casino experience can come to them through a computer screen or mobile device.

When *DoubleDown Casino* launched in 2010, many developers focused on games that embraced virtual farms and multiple colored bubbles rather than

casino chips. About two years later, the makers of *DoubleDown Casino* were acquired by IGT for \$500 million, and the purchase drove many developers, and interactive entertainment studios to create a casino game on Facebook and mobile. Subsequently, casinos have become the largest gaming genre on Facebook, and many high-profile social game companies plan to release their virtual Vegas experience on social later this year. The problem, however, is that many developers fail to understand some important concepts that have made a casual casino title like *DoubleDown Casino* a hit.

A Vacation Right from Where You're Sitting

People often play games because they have a strong desire to escape into another world. Games are a brief diversion from life that can be as rewarding and fun as experiences we have in the real world. When people come to play a casino game on their



The design of a casual casino game in today's connected world should center on three fundamental elements: the sights, the sounds and the social experiences.

desktop or a mobile device, they want to feel as if they stepped away from their desk or living room and immersed themselves into a new world created just for them—a world that takes them on a vacation right from where they're sitting, and brings them into a virtual casino where there's fun and excitement.

The design of a casual casino game in today's connected world should center on three fundamental elements: the sights, the sounds and the social experiences. Virtual casino games need to be designed to harness these three elements to attract more players and generate more micro-transactions. When focusing on design, it is important to create experiences that immedi-

ately draw people in and let them live out their Vegas casino fantasies. If the design is done well, developers can expect that players will keep coming back.

Designed for Players

Studios need to work closely with developers to create virtual games that embrace real casino experiences in Vegas—a floor filled with dozens of slot games, blackjack, poker and roulette tables, and bingo. Designers and developers should visit various popular casinos at different times of the day to better understand the attractiveness of these experiences and the mechanics behind the games, and to study the design and layout of casinos. Embrace the sounds of people cheering and noises from machines winning—from the moment the doors to the casino open to when they close behind you. These sounds tend to trigger desires to be part of the excitement.

One key design element of *DoubleDown Casino*, for instance, is the sound of winning machines. That sound tends to remind many of a Vegas vacation. Even before people start to play, they are flooded with memories of excited crowds of people who all seem to be having fun. Many other casual casino games have a beautiful design and wonderful game mechanics yet completely fail to deliver a strong audio experience that draws people in the same way it does at a real casino.

Games for Winners

Slots and video poker machines make up 90 percent of the games in a Vegas casino. Why? Slots are a giant math problem that the masses love yet they are incredibly easy to play. People just deposit their money and press a button to test their luck. Blackjack and Craps, however, require more skill than slots and video poker, and so even though they offer

better odds of winning, they tend to be less popular games at a real casino. But having several different games on a casino floor lets people explore different gaming experiences without having to actually exit the casino. It's important to balance the types of games offered at a virtual casino with the types of experiences people want so they stay longer, and in turn, spend more.

DoubleDown Casino, for instance, now offers 28 games in seven categories—more than any other casino game application on Facebook. In addition to several slot games, players can also find *Omaha Poker*, *Texas Hold 'Em*, the classic-five card draw, and a number of virtual blackjack tables. Players can take their winnings and bet virtual chips across any of these 28 games, thus making the experience feel more real and the winnings more exciting.

Many casinos, including *DoubleDown Casino*, offer much-higher-than-real-life casino payouts. Ultimately, players should feel just as excited about winning in a virtual casino as a real one, but to achieve this, designers need to bring in as many elements of an actual casino as possible. *DoubleDown's* relationship with IGT (makers of *Da Vinci Diamonds Slots* and *Cleopatra Slots*) for example, has helped them craft a balance between online and offline. Casino games—whether in Vegas or in the virtual world—should complement each other, and not compete against each other. It's what draws people in and keeps them coming back to play.

Winners Share with Their Facebook Friends

One thing that sets casual casino games on Facebook apart from real casinos is this: What happens in Facebook gets *shared*. Not only should players of casual casino games have the opportunity to share their successes on Facebook (as with other social games), but they must have the opportunity to win big and share some of those winnings with friends.

It's just one of the common Vegas fantasies that virtual players want to live out. Who doesn't want to take the house down? And there's no reason to keep all the winnings to yourself. Digital casino destinations let players feed into the ideal social night at a casino—make friends, be lucky, and win big. Casino games on Facebook that offer shared gaming experiences—letting players come together to gift millions of chips or compete in friendly tournaments—bring our desires to life.

It's what Vegas is all about, right? ❁

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Now We Are Talking

A Conversation with Alex Ness of Toys for Bob

Alex Ness has been in the video game industry since 1993. Starting off as a Consumer Service Rep at SEGA, he went on to work at Crystal Dynamic, before ending up as a Senior Producer for Toys for Bob. Over his career, Ness has been a producer, designer, designer-producer, producer-designer, writer, and voice actor on a variety of games, including *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam*, *Madagascar 1 & 2*, and of course, the *Skylanders* series. Before that, he's not quite sure what happened. He was (allegedly) involved in some kind of explosion at a crumpet factory—and the rest is kind of fuzzy.



BOUNCER

Element: Tech

Phrase: Deal with the Wheel!

Character type: Giant

Bouncer Bio: Long ago, Bouncer was an All-Star Roboto Ball player. But when the evil Arkeyan Empire destroyed his home town and discontinued the games, he was converted into a security-bot and stationed in the mines. It was there that Bouncer encountered dozens of Mabu prisoners who remembered him fondly from his playing days. He quickly became a bit of a celebrity around the mines, and it wasn't long before this new adulation convinced him that he could be just as much of a hero in life as he was on the field. Thus, he decided to join the Skylanders and take a stand against the evil, Arkeyan overlords.



Every person who has ever played a video game has at least once thought about having a career in the industry. How did you begin your career?

When I was a little kid, I was a huge fan of games, and I used to come up with my own ideas for video games and draw them. I was a terrible artist, but luckily, back then graphic quality was much different than it is now. I could draw something pretty much at the level of what you might see on the Atari 2600 or Commodore 64. Once ColecoVision came out though, I was completely surpassed. After I drew/designed my game, I would sometimes mail it in to various companies just to see if I could get a response (I never did). A couple of the games that really inspired me were *Archon* and *Mail Order Monsters*, and some of the ideas I sent in were actually sequels to those two games. Funny thing was that Paul Reiche was a designer on both of them, and little did I know I would one day be working with that very same dude.

As I got a little older, I lost sight of my video game dreams and started preparing for a more likely career in the food service industry. But I really lucked out: I met some people who worked in the consumer service department at SEGA and they somehow got me a job interview there. This was right before SEGA got really big (with the release of *Sonic 2*) so they might have been more willing to give a guy like me a chance. In any case, they hired me. From there, I got into testing, then production, design and then whatever it is I do now.

Given that you started your career in the gaming industry at 17, do you feel that today a college degree will help someone get into the gaming industry? Do you worry that at some point the industry will be closed off for people without an advanced degree?

Like I said earlier, I am one lucky duck. I was able to sneak into the industry totally by coincidence. Things have changed a lot since the early '90s. We got rid of those slow modems, rock and roll doesn't exist in any significant capacity, and there are now many universities that offer great video game programs in their respective schools. It used to be that you couldn't exactly take classes that told you how to make a game. You could learn programming languages and some digital art skills, but I don't think the curriculum was tailored specifically for video games until the last ten years or so.

Now there are tons of qualified candidates coming right out of college, and if you were considering hiring one of them or some other schmo who didn't have any professional experience, you'd probably take the college person, right? All other things being equal, that is. Plus, a lot of these schools have placement programs.

But that being said, if you are a great artist or a great animator and can come up with a compelling reel, it may not matter at all whether you've been to college or not. That's possibly true for programmers as well—if you can show impressive examples



of your work and abilities. It's a little bit tougher for designers and producers but a lot of them can still get into the industry by starting off in the QA department and proving themselves to the right people. In spirit, it's still true that anyone who has drive and determination can make it into games, but it's been a little supplanted by college, which I don't actually think is a bad thing. I doubt it will ever be closed off to people without an advanced degree, but in any case, I continue to thank my lucky stars that I got in when I did. »



Alex Ness, Chief of Staff,
Toys for Bob, Novato, CA

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CHILL

Element: Water

Phrase: Stay Cool!

Character type: New Skylander

Bio: Chill was the sworn guardian and personal protector of the Snow Queen. As captain of the queen's guard, her many heroic deeds had earned her the respect of the entire Ice Kingdom. But when the Cyclops army began to expand their empire into the northern realms, the Snow Queen was taken prisoner during her watch, and Chill has never forgiven herself for letting it happen. Ashamed and embarrassed, she left the Ice Kingdom behind and swore never to return until she could reclaim her honor. Now as a member of the Skylanders, she remains courageous and strong, while always on the lookout for her lost queen.

After starting off at SEGA, you worked at Crystal Dynamics for several years before joining the team at Toys for Bob. In your opinion, what have been some of the biggest changes you've witnessed over your twenty years?

Wow, I feel like games have changed so much in the last 20 years—more than anything else I can think of, in fact, other than mobile devices. When I first starting working in games, we were in the 16-bit era. Not only was there a dramatic shift when games went from 2D to 3D, but even on a higher level, I think the biggest change is really this notion of reality. Originally, games were anything but realistic. As a matter of fact, they were quite the opposite. As technology got better, we began to get better at mimicking reality. You could go anywhere you wanted to go, do anything you wanted to do, and everything could be (or had to be) explained. Then, online play got bigger and bigger too.

Going hand-in-hand with these innovations is the fact that it also took more and more people to make these more advanced games. Three-to-ten people used to be able to do all the design, art, and programming on a 16-bit title. Now, you'll see teams can run in excess of 250 people for AAA games. That obviously means that games cost a lot more to make, which changes what kind of games get made (and I'm just talking about the console market). With social and mobile games, there has been an interesting renaissance of the old-school games, with small teams and narrow focuses and whatnot.

Skylanders Spyro's Adventure has been a huge hit, due in part to its integrated toy line. Why do you think this combination of toys and video gaming works so well?

I think when kids play with their toys, they imagine them doing things and going on adventures. I know I used to. Not only would I imagine my G.I. Joes fighting in battles, but I really loved football—so I made up my own imaginary football league with G.I. Joes. Duke would throw the ball to Snake Eyes to beat Destro and Snow Job (Joes and Cobras could be on the same team). Anyway, one of the cool things *Skylanders* offers is the chance to actually have real adventures with these toys in the video game world. You don't have to imagine any more! Sort of kidding there. You can still go on imaginary adventures, obviously, but now there's a video game component as well. Hopefully it's the best of both worlds.



SPYRO

Phrase: All Fired Up!

Element: Magic

Character Type: Series 2

Bio: Spyro hails from a rare line of magical purple dragons that come from a faraway land few have ever traveled. It's been said that the Scrolls of the Ancients mention Spyro prominently—the old Portal Masters having chronicled his many exciting adventures and heroic deeds. Finally, it was Master Eon himself who reached out and invited him to join the Skylanders. From then on, evil faced a new enemy—and the Skylanders gained a valued ally.

With *Skylanders: Giants*, set to be released in October 2012, what are some distinct ways you hope this installment expands on the world of Skylanders?

The idea was to make it feel very much like an extension of *Spyro's Adventure* without losing anything that was great about that game. We wanted to make everything better and introduce enough new stuff to make it fresh. Kind of a fine line to walk, but I really think we nailed it. I probably can't go into too much detail on *everything* that's new, but here are some of the highlights:

First off, we introduce the Giants, who are indeed giant Skylanders that have brand new abilities. For example, they have these awesome things we call "Feats of Strength" that allow for new game-play and access to new areas. We've also got other new Skylanders and, believe me, they offer some brand new ways to play as well. All Skylanders, new and old, now have their own specific toy quests—individual achievements related to that character's unique abilities and elemental affiliation.

Then we have these things we simply call arena battles that occur both on the main path of the game and as optional side quests. In arena battles, the player (and a friend) can battle waves of enemies and tons of hazards inside arenas, sometimes with »



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TREE REX

Element: Life

Phrase: Be Afraid of the Bark!

Character type: Giant

Bio: Long before the Giants protected Skylands, Tree Rex was a majestic tree living peacefully in the ancient woods. But this tranquil existence came to an end when the Arkeyans built a nearby factory to produce war machines. After years of his soil being poisoned by the magic and tech waste from the factory, he mutated into who he is now—a powerful Giant who will crush anything that threatens the natural order of things.

specialized rules like “don’t take any damage” or “protect thing X.” We’ve also added a collectible-based mini-game called Skystones. It’s kind of the classic, takes-a-minute-to-learn-and-a-lifetime-to-master strategy game—though I guess maybe it does not technically take a lifetime to master. Something else that is new to *Skylanders Giants* is our in-game store. We knew that players of *Skylanders Spyro’s Adventure* would likely have some toys which have acquired a fair amount of treasure in the last game, and we wanted to give them things to spend it on in *Giants*. I would say that, in general, we really focused on adding more and more replayability to *Giants*, and that includes more collectibles, more side quests and more rewards.

Can you comment on some of the challenges faced when adapting such an interactive game to smaller devices like the Wii U and the Nintendo 3DS?

I actually can’t comment too much because our studio was not directly involved in developing those platforms, but I can tell you what the biggest challenge was (particularly with the 3DS). We felt like it was really critical that all of our toys be platform ag-

nostic. So you could take your Trigger Happy, play on the Wii for a while, go over to a friend’s house, play on their 360, and then have a totally different adventure with that same toy on the 3DS. Making sure that all of the toys not only worked but that things like treasure and experience points and abilities were all transferable between the consoles was a little tricky, as it was something entirely new.

Activision has just announced that a mobile version of the Skylanders franchise, *Skylanders Cloud Patrol*, will be released for the Kindle Fire HD. Do you feel that a game on a tablet is significantly different than a game on a Wii U, 3DS, or other portable systems?

I think the biggest difference is the audience. Anyone can have a tablet or smart phone, but chances are, if you buy the Wii U or 3DS, you’re a gamer on some level. So a lot of the tablet games probably need to take that into account. I feel like *Cloud Patrol* is a great example of that because it is so easy and fun to pick up and play for any length of time. ❄

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